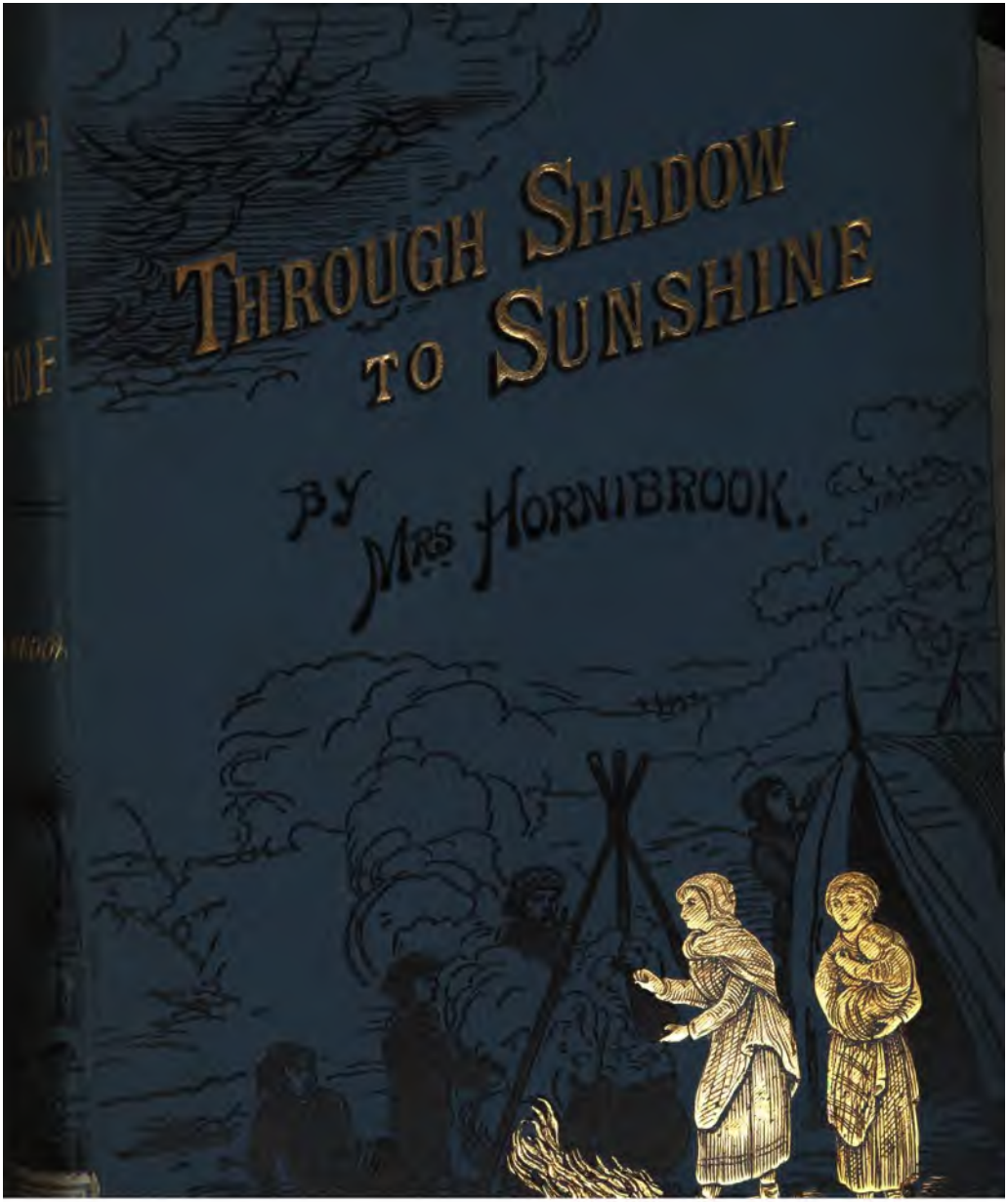
THROUGH SHADOW TO SUNSHINE

BY MRS HORNIBROOK.



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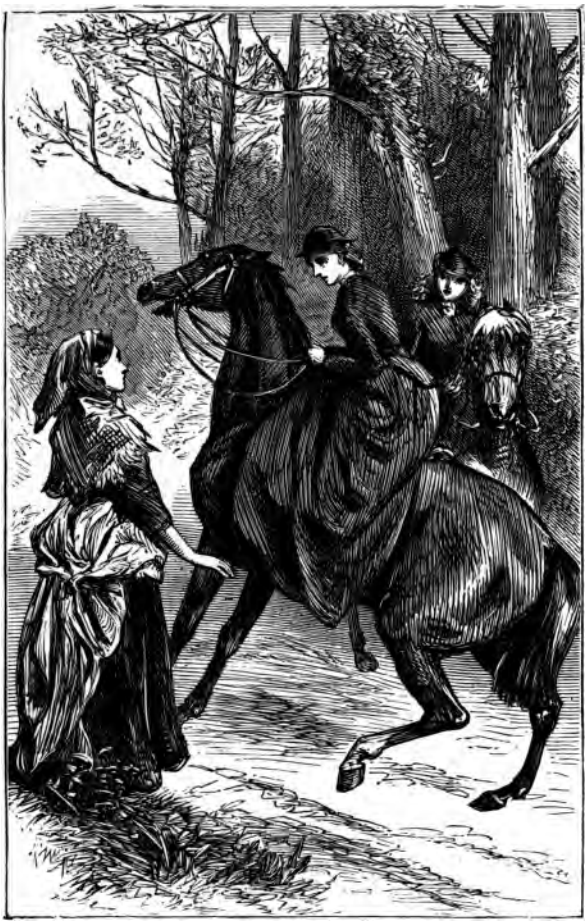
Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON



"You are not afraid of me?" questioned the gipsy.—*Page* 32.

THROUGH SHADOW

TO

SUNSHINE.

BY

EMMA E. HORNIBROOK,

AUTHOR OF

"INTO THE LIGHT," "RYNGE CASTLE," "TRUE TO A TRUST,"
"BORNE BACK," ETC. ETC.

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCLXXXIII.

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THROUGH SHADOW TO SUNSHINE.

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CHAPTER I.

MY HOME.

My dear old home! how shall I describe it? It was in truth a nest, a warm, loving nest, in which I was most tenderly nurtured and safely sheltered. From this it must not be inferred that it was a cosy little corner, into which no rough blast from the outer world could come, and where the sunbeams loved to linger. It was a large, plainly-built mansion of solid masonry, with well-cut cornices in white stone to relieve the grey walls, and a light verandah at one side supported by a row of somewhat elegant pillars. It had two stories, wide casements, and within and without everything bore the impress of "substan-

tial" upon it. It stood on an extensive and well-cultivated farm of which my father held the fee-simple. (I think that is the term.) He had no heir; no one to leave in the comfortable nest the parent birds had so carefully built, but two daughters with eight years disparity between them in age,—my elder sister Helen and me.

Let us deal with the house first, or the lining of the nest, as we may call it, before we describe its occupants. Within was every appliance needed for comfort and convenience. The large rooms, with their lofty ceilings; the heavy furniture of the dining-room, mounted in morocco; the elegant drawing-room, where, except in two others, the hand of taste was most manifest, with its French windows opening on the beautiful velvet-like lawn, the pretty breakfast-room or summer parlour nestling under the verandah. How well I can recall how dearly I loved them all! They have been somewhat changed in the lapse of years, but not improved: no, they could not be improved.

Need I now say I was proud of it. I often went in alone to these well-kept rooms, my heart swelling with a satisfied sense of being at home. I often looked over the broad acres with their golden grain, each bowing its head in graceful submission before me as Joseph's brethren's sheaves did in his dream, and thought with delight, "These belong to my father!" I have climbed up into a tree, and felt that young heart of mine almost bursting with its own capacity and greatness, yet with a strange sighing through it still like the distant chanting of uncomprehended music, or the moan of the wind on the hill-tops. It did not represent an empty chamber then, where I might single out the echoes awakened.

The right of possession, the sense of ownership, was delightful. Even so the good man, of whom I have heard or read somewhere, may have felt when he surveyed a lovely landscape swelling away to a great distance, and whispered to himself, "My Father made it all!" Ah, I think he had more than

the pride of proprietorship, the recognition of relationship; he exulted in the sense of what the Great Author and Finisher was in Himself, as manifested in His works. I was more like a little bird surveying a pleasant resting-place, with the power to fly, but loving too well to linger in the warm nest, never thinking of, never thanking, the gracious Giver and Disposer, save by a burst of gladness in song.

I have said that in two rooms more than others the hand of taste was apparent. I may describe them as an inner room and a sanctum. "Though last not least," the sanctum—my mother's room! There I took every childish disappointment and care. There I laid down every burden and gained new strength. There my character was moulded and developed; and when her dear smooth hands (capable but not roughened), with a gentle firmness all their own, stroked my cheek or were laid in blessing on my head, I felt indeed earth was beautiful and life was good, and "the lines had fallen unto me in

pleasant places." I was truly rich, and God added no sorrow therewith.

I shall not describe my mother's room further, save that I know there was an arm-chair and a footstool in it. I never thought much about the position of anything else: her presence made it beautiful and clear and calm.

My special nest was a little *boudoir* which I shared with my sister Helen. Here I dozed and dreamt, read, studied, worked, or sketched, as seemed best to my childish fancy. Here I often flung cushions on the ground and curled myself into a soft ball upon them, with my pet kitten in my arms, and knew the sun was shining, or the rain or snow falling without, as the case might be; it mattered not,—I was in my nest,—at home and happy

"If solid happiness we prize,
Within our breast this jewel lies,
And they are fools who roam;
The world has nothing to bestow,
From our own selves our joys must flow,
And that dear spot—our home." *

* Cotton.

Now for the family. My father Mr. Munro, of course, as its head, first. He was one of the leading agriculturists in an agricultural district, and reputed wealthy. In all public affairs and business matters he was regarded as a sort of oracle in the neighbourhood, and in his household his verdict was, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, unalterable. Even his letters were remarkable for their brevity and clearness: in two lines he would convey as much as another could in two pages. He was tall, of rather a portly form, with handsome features and a grave manner, dignified, I called it, as befitting one in his position. He was not stern, but *awfully* righteous: I use the word advisedly, for his strict justice produced dread in me. I would not have given utterance to a silly expression, or been aught but truthful and candid in his presence, knowing that the slightest deviation from right principles would have been severely censured. Perhaps the greatest punishment he could have inflicted upon me was maintaining a silence full of grave displeasure.

How well I remember his teaching and explaining to me some lines by old George Herbert:

> "Dare to be true, nothing can need a lie;
> A fault which needs it most grows two thereby."

My father always reminded me of one of the old Covenanters in the tales I loved to read; and in spite of his being somewhat strait-laced in his religious opinions, his straightforward, upright manner commanded respect from all who knew him. Whether it may be put to the account of his character, position, or our own gifts and graces, I cannot tell, but every member of the rich Mr. Munro's household found themselves of some importance in our corner of the dear old Angle-land.

I cannot describe my mother any more than I could her room. She was the fairest woman to me in the world, and managed with the most perfect quietude of manner to govern her own household, and "have her children in subjection." There was always a sense of repose connected with her. She read me as easily as she would have an open book, yet I

was not afraid of her scrutiny. Accustomed from earliest childhood to have no concealment on my part, I knew her corrections were ever mild yet efficient, and breathed the truest love when most severe. What she had to bear from my naturally impetuous temper and lively imagination (for I ever had an exuberant fancy), I blush now to recall. There was a verse in the Bible which always occurred to me with regard to her;—it was, "Clear shining after rain." Who has not gazed upon a lovely scene after a storm has passed away, and felt his or her spirit bathed in the profound calm that pervaded nature? Did ever the deep vault of heaven look so serenely blue as when dark clouds have been lately swept across it? or the sun woo the earth with a brighter smile than when issuing from obscurity? I could not reason about this as a child, but felt the sweet peace of my mother's face before I could understand, much less analyse it. It was brightness after a convulsion, "clear shining after rain," the joy which is born of suffering.

Is it contrast alone which makes the calm succeeding a storm so profound? or is there a peace more deep and clear than that which bears the impress of trouble past?

Yet had my mother passed through trial? I did not know if she had, and cannot tell how I came to feel it, but children are very observant, and receive impressions long ere they become reasoners. A few things were happily certain,—my mother reigned supreme in her husband's affections, was perfect mistress in her comfortable home, and entirely happy.

Though Helen was eight years older she was as young in many ways as I. She was like our mother, tall and slight, with soft brown hair and earnest blue eyes. My own young feet did not brush the dew from the grass, or bend the daisies' heads beneath them with a lighter tread than did hers, nor was there a brighter light in my face, I am sure, even when it dimpled most, than shone in hers. We are not Scotch, but I always called Helen's face "bonny." There were many

pretty pictures around our home, but I think the prettiest of all was my sister's face.

No one ever told me I was pretty, at least, no one then I mean, for I am speaking of my very youthful days, but I often told Helen she was, and I don't think it spoiled her one bit. She would only smile and say:

"I am quite willing you should think so, dear; indeed I should be much disappointed if you did not. 'There is no face like the face that loves us.'"

"Or the face that has God's peace upon it," added my mother to me afterwards. "No natural adornment lends such a charm as that."

I pondered a little over these words then. Had I this adornment? I looked into the glass, and looked into my own heart, and answered candidly as I had been taught to do, yet a little regretfully, "No."

Was I a Christian in more than name and outward training? I could not say I was. I knew my father, mother, and sister were, and did not intend they should go into heaven

without me. How could I bear to be excluded from their company for ever? No, I would be one with them in heart and faith and hope —some day.

My mother's eyes sometimes said wistfully, "When?" Helen, I knew, pleasantly tried to win, but my father once characteristically said,

"Do not express more than you feel, child. Be honest in everything: most of all in the things of God."

To this advice I was determined to adhere. At least I would not be a hypocrite, or say what those I most loved said,—until I felt it.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER'S TROUBLE.

HAVING described the sunshine in the old home, let us come to its first shadow known to me—the shadow of another's trouble.

We were seated (that is, my father, mother, Helen and I), at our early breakfast one morning when I was about eleven years old, as the post-bag was as usual brought in. My father opened it and dispensed the contents according to their directions. Of course there was nothing for me, so in the silence that ensued I amused myself by observing the countenances of the readers, and trying to guess therefrom the nature of the communications. I began with Helen; she bent with a pleased expression over three sheets of paper, the writing on which was very close but not crossed. As her eyes met mine for a

moment, I saw there was a brighter light than usual in them,—that kind of light which shines through a very April shower of joy. My father knitted his brows and looked thoughtful, but not stern or sad. Last of all, I glanced towards my mother. It was evident she had received troublous tidings, for her eyes had a far-away dreamy expression in their quiet depths, and a large tear was actually coursing its way down her cheek. I watched, in a sort of spell-bound terror, the colour fade from her cheek and gradually come back again, and would have rushed to her side, but that raising her head for an instant she met my anxious fears, as she always met me in everything, half-way, and checked me by a gesture. Even in that hurried moment I felt jealous of, and angry with, the tidings that had caused my mother pain.

Thus forced into silence again, and to control my impatience, I gazed steadfastly forth over the sloping lawn bordered on one side by a row of tall elm and beech trees. A

light breeze was stirring their tops, and I could fancy I heard a rustling which breathed peace to my perturbed spirit. I could see the cattle pass outside the gate as they were turned in for milking, and hear the lowing of the calves claiming their breakfast too, yet gambolling meanwhile. One or two hungry robins perched on the japonica which grew outside the window beneath the verandah. Every influence was soothing, and I had almost forgotten my half-framed trouble when my father's voice recalled me to where it lay like a shadow in the quiet room.

"Have you had any bad news, my dear?" he asked, I suppose perceiving mother's agitation. I fancied his own tones were less steady than usual.

"My cousin Mary Leyne is very ill," she replied in a low voice, and I felt without looking at her, with a quivering lip. "You know we were like sisters in the old home long ago, and she left it first. I fancy I can see her now, the merry, bright girl, whom we teased about her sailor-lad when he was far

at sea, and fain would have kept from him when he returned. She went from us with a laugh, to counteract our tears, she said. Ah, how many tears, dear girl, she has since shed!"

As mother's eyes overflowed so did Helen's and mine for sympathy.

"Captain Leyne was a gallant fellow," my father said. "He did his duty as a gentleman and died as a Christian."

"Ah well, doubtless you are right," mother returned; "but it seems to me a mistaken sense of duty which led a man to sacrifice himself when all hope of saving the ship after the fatal collision was past, and he was pressed to take a place in the boat. Poor Mary had so looked and longed for his return. You remember she did not speak one word of welcome when I went to her, only said with dry eyes, 'You may weep for me *now!*' The first tears she shed were when I placed her baby in her arms."

The shadow of another's trouble fell darkly in our quiet room in the silence that ensued.

I did not feel disposed to resent the evil tidings now.

"What do you propose doing, Barbara?" my father asked again after a pause, in his usual off-hand, business way. (Our mother's name was Barbara.)

"Mary anxiously desires to see me, her kind friend and physician writes," she replied, "and see she has added two words—'*Do come!*' How unlike her former clear, bold hand. She must be troubled about her little daughter." Here mother looked straight with (as I thought) a soft, beseeching expression at my father.

He met her gaze as steadily. I had always admired him, I believed you could not see a finer or handsomer man anywhere, but never admired him more than when he said,

"Barbara, if it will be any comfort to your mind to do as the good Lord directs about your cousin's child, then take the assurance it will be without hindrance from me."

My mother did not speak, but she put her hand upon his shoulder. I suppose the action

conveyed her gratitude and sense of relief, but I am sure she thanked him afterwards when calmer.

And so it was arranged that if my mother's unknown cousin died her little daughter was to live with us. As we were in affluence there were no pecuniary considerations to be got over, and no calculations as to whether she would be independent or not. Already—before we had even seen her, she had a place assigned her as one of the family. Directly I became aware of this I assailed my mother with a perfect volley of questions.

"Is she little or big, mother? Will she walk and play and feed the chicks with me? Will she care for the tame pigeons, and come into the woods to hear the wild ones?"

"I do not know whether she is little or big for her years, darling," my mother replied, smiling in spite of herself at my eagerness, "but I know she is about my Connie's age."

"Then she may ride Lassie, or if frightened at first, she can practise on Jennie, you know."

(Lassie was my black pony: Jennie a favourite donkey.)

"I cannot say how far she will enter into your pleasures and duties, Connie," was the grave reply. "Remember her early days are clouded by sorrow. Who alone can comfort her?"

"You," I answered decidedly.

Now I knew perfectly well that this was neither the answer my mother looked for, nor hoped to receive, nevertheless it was true as far as it went; she was the best comforter to whom I could direct any one.

"My dear child," she said very seriously, "the good man Job, of whom you read in your Bible, was compelled to say of his nearest earthly friends, 'Miserable comforters are ye all.' Even the most loving parent may fail to help in life, and cannot go with you through death, but one who trusts in the Lord may add, 'When my father and mother forsake me the Lord will take me up.' 'A woman may forget, yet will I not forget thee,' saith the Lord."

This was not such comfort as my poor mother hoped it would prove. The idea of the great God always thinking about little me was appalling. I had not yet been brought into such dire circumstances that all earthly props failed me, and I felt wholly cast upon Him for aid.

After a pause mother said,

"I should not be surprised if the Lord used you as a little comforter, Connie."

"Me, mamma!" I exclaimed, "I am afraid I should make a very poor one."

"Let me hear the only way in which you could set about it?" returned my mother, smiling again.

I mused for awhile.

"Well, I suppose I would take her into the garden first of all, and if she was nice, give her a rose or two, or I might get a patch all for herself from Williams, if she cared to work in it, or show her over the farm, and love her if she let me; that is," I added with candour, "if others do not make too much of her."

My mother took no notice of the latter part of my speech, only kissed me and said,

"That is very well, my dear. You have a part to do which none of us could take as well. Only, my child, remember the Lord Jesus is your best Friend. I do not know how much the poor orphan who is coming to us has been taught about Him, but you, at least, have enjoyed Christian training. See that you do not turn her aside from the paths of peace, but rather commend the religion of the family by your pleasant, gracious ways. Oh! that you knew for yourself the blessedness of looking up constantly to this unseen Friend, thus might your cousin be led to seek Him also."

"Will she be my cousin, mother?"

"She *is*," replied my mother, smiling again in spite of herself.

"One question more," I pleaded as she rose to go away, "only one more question. Tell me again my cousin's name."

"Hope Leyne."

"Why was she called Hope?" I began anew, supplementing the question by another.

"She was so named by her mother in her father's absence," she replied. "It may have been by his desire; it may be in view of a re-union which was never to take place on earth."

"Is it not a pretty name?"

"I think so."

"Prettier than Constance?" I foolishly asked.

"I think not."

"Why do you think so?" I persisted.

"Because Constance is my dear little daughter's. I associate the name with, and love it for the person; I do not take my idea of the person from the name."

"Why, then, did you call us Helen and Connie, instead of Biddy, Julia, or Kitty, dear mamma?"

"Because I confess to a weakness for pretty things, and titles."

"I wonder is my strange cousin pretty."

"I do not know," returned my mother gravely, "and strange as it may appear, I do not care. She is an orphan dependent on us,

and she has an immortal soul which God wills should be happy in the knowledge of His love, for time and for eternity."

There was a short silence; then I began again,

"But, mother, all the people who lived long ago, and who do great things in books, have grand names."

"Not all, Connie," said my mother pleasantly. "I think the greatest heroes are amongst the Toms, Dicks, and Bills of real life."

"And Johns," I put in. (My father's name was John.)

"And Johns, of course."

Here my mother left me, and I fell into a train of thought.

Hope! The name was encouraging; nay more, it was perfectly charming. I always had a vivid fancy, as I have said, and could not help picturing to myself people of whom I heard or read. I am sure I imagined the four Maries of Scottish history, with their lovely but ill-fated mistress, until they did not seem

dead and gone, and the characters in the many books I devoured became each in turn as real and life-like as any I ever met. From this cause all history was to me an enchanted page,—the record of noble deeds and mighty sufferings, a picture gallery wherein were depicted lovely characters who must have had corresponding forms. As a rule, the living people whom fancy sketched without seeing them, proved when met very unlike the ideal. I remembered that the village schoolmaster, Mr. Shorten, was about the tallest man I had ever seen, while Mr. Long, our chemist and apothecary, was a little, fat, puffy man. Still Hope could not be otherwise than bright and fair; her naturally joyous disposition damped by terrible trial, it is true, yet in time rising above and beyond this, and rejoicing in the many blessings which would surround her in our home.

Thus I mused and dreamt, and already the shadow was passing away from our home. In my young fancy not only was the sunshine coming back in a general way, but a very

bright ray being introduced in the person of the strange cousin. Ah (as I afterwards found out), people and things are very much what we make them, rather than what they prove in themselves, and we live in a world of our own creating, and amidst surroundings as unreal as those we know in dreams. Truth and fiction strangely blend in our ideas and reception of everything, so that we cannot wholly trust our own judgment. Well is it that in all essentials we have an unerring guide,—the written Word of God.

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT IS HOME WITHOUT A MOTHER?"

My mother left home for the first time in many years. Ere she went she said to me,

"Connie, you have a poetic fancy, that is, you make more out of circumstances or things than they would convey to a common observer. Take care that your imagination does not lead you astray. Do not picture your cousin to yourself before you see her: in other words, do not create a little girl in your own mind to suit her name. If so, you will be disappointed. You must not be discouraged if in person and manner your cousin should not prove as attractive as you expect. Remember it was said of Him who is 'altogether lovely' to His people, that some should see 'no beauty in Him that they should desire Him.' They

looked only on the outward appearance, we know His heart of love."

"I don't think Hope will be nice," I said after a pause, almost dejectedly.

"I feel she will not be what you desire," returned my mother, smiling. "You need a lesson, and our Heavenly Father may teach it to you in this way. Yet if you look to Him, and seek to please Him whatever may happen, good must come to you and all things work a blessing. Do not let me frighten you, darling," she added, seeing me look grave, "'forewarned is forearmed,' you know."

From that time the fever of my expectation was considerably lessened, and in a very sober mood I began to arrange some things which my mother had left for me to do. It was well she had made demands on my time while absent, for never before had my home seemed dull, or its beautiful prospect dreary. I went into the dining-room ;—how heavy and stiff it looked; the drawing-room was shady and gloomy, the summer-parlour garish. I did not then know Milton's splendid lines:

"The mind of its own self, and in its place,
Can make a hell of heaven, of heaven a hell."

Heaven is not so much a place as a state, and in this sense, a condition of mind and heart more than a fixed locality goes to form *a home.*

I opened a drawer in a side-table, from which some papers fell. As I stooped to pick up and replace them, a prettily ornamented scroll lay open. It bore this motto,—"What is home without a mother?" My tears fell fast upon it. I was in a highly-wrought state of feeling, and it was the last drop which made the full cup overflow. Helen found me thus.

"Why, Connie, dear little sister," she exclaimed, "this is carrying your grief for a short separation too far. Mother has only gone away for a little while, and we should try and do just as she wishes until her return. Of course we miss her, but have not lost her, thank God, for through all the sense of loneliness and dulness I feel as if she was strangely present; everything around us is so associated with her, you know."

"And I feel as if taking her away and out of everything had left every place dreadfully dull and bare," I sobbed.

"But you are not going to take her out of everything in this short absence," she returned with a smile; "that would indeed be a loss. Write a little to her every day, that will be like talking, and will seem to bring you nearer, and then try and do every little thing as if she was looking at you and you were preparing for her return; so your heart will be warmed by a sense of meriting her approbation. Come now, I want you to take a ride with me. Can you get ready at once?"

I dried my eyes and flew off to prepare. Childhood is a blessed season; its sorrows are so short-lived: its pleasures so pure and simple. At least, mine were; but I knew not then of other children to whom suffering has come as a birthright, and shame as a heritage; whose pulses never throb ecstatically, and whose young hearts send forth no notes of gladness. Young? Ah me, for such there is no youth and spring and joy. They seem to

have been born old; drinking in with their earliest apprehensions an experience of sin and misery which it might take us a lifetime to attain.

In a short time Helen and I were cantering down the long avenue and out upon the high road, our spirits rising with the fresh air and exercise. Our road lay along a narrow river which, descending quickly from the hills as if in haste to its quiet bed in the plain, here coursed pleasantly along, murmuring sweet music. On its banks we drew rein, while Helen sent the servant on to the bend in the river, with a message to a distant farmhouse. We had been silent a long time when I asked suddenly,

"Helen, has our mother ever been in trouble—before now, I mean?"

"Do you not remember her story of our Uncle Leyne's death and poor aunt's trouble?" she answered with (for her) strange evasion.

The hesitation in her manner was very perceptible. I felt she was concealing something.

"There is not such a great difference after all between us in years," I said petulantly, "that you are to have secrets from me. I suppose I am not worthy of your confidence."

"Connie!" exclaimed my sister as if shocked. The next moment I would have thrown myself right off the pony's back entreating her pardon.

"Wait till we get home, dear," she replied gently; "there we shall be able to settle our differences and have no secrets one from the other. Meanwhile, let us get into good humour at a smart rate."

She touched her favourite bay mare with the whip as she spoke and went off at a gallop. Lassie was always a spirited little thing, and I had enough to do to hold her in, but we understood one another perfectly, and I had long been accustomed to a steady seat in the saddle.

"Helen," I gasped as I got up to her, "why are you like a verb just now? Give it up?"

"I do," she returned, "I am not equal to mental effort."

"Because you are in the Imperative Mood."

"You may rather say the Potential," she exclaimed, laughing. "In the house I am a weak girl,—a very reed, but on horseback I feel like a mistress of the world, daring, proud and powerful."

"How do you know how a mistress of the world would feel?" I retorted. "I am sure the great queens we read of were dreadfully wicked."

"I am afraid so, Connie; I am afraid so. We cannot be trusted with power, so I must come down from my high horse by and by."

We had again slackened our pace to a walk, and were just rounding the corner of a strange dark copse which bordered one side of the road, when a female figure started from it so suddenly as to frighten Lassie, who reared violently and would have thrown me off but that with admirable presence of mind Helen seized the bridle, bidding me at the same time

sit firm and grasp the pony by the mane. I recovered my command of the animal instantly, and spoke assuringly to her. She ceased to dance, came to her senses and her forelegs together, and stood still. At the same moment the intruder laid a detaining hand upon my sister's bridle.

She was young and might have been very pretty, but her dark eyes were restless, passionate, and wild, and in her gesture and whole bearing was a kind of proud defiance which, though strange to my sight, suited her well. She gazed steadily, almost curiously, into my sister's face, upon which I could not refrain from turning to look.

Helen's colour came and went in pretty, transient, pink flushes, and her features appeared more than usually delicate in contrast with those of the stranger, but her clear blue eyes betokened no alarm, and looked into the dark ones, now fixed intently upon her, with a fearlessness all their own.

"You are not afraid of me," questioned the gipsy, for such she evidently was, "and yet

I can read your future! Shall I tell your fortune, pretty lady?"

"No," returned my sister in her usual gentle, steady tones. "Why should I fear you? I do not believe in the power you assume."

"I might do you wrong," said the girl, with a short, unpleasant laugh, "but I may do you right. You should fear me because I am a desperate woman, and—well, I suppose, not a woman set up and quiet like you."

"Still a woman," returned my sister even more gently than before, "with a woman's heart, and, mayhap, a woman's patience, seeking aid from a sister-woman."

"A woman's heart!" laughed the girl yet more scornfully; "perhaps it would have been better for me if it had been crushed out of me, and quieted when I was a baby. I would like to throw it under your horse's hoofs just now. Patience! I never knew it; neither can I fancy earth holds a sister for me."

"Earth holds a sister and heaven a friend for the miserable. There is a Saviour"——

"Stop, lady, none of that. I dunno Him you speak on, nor your fine doings. Much good as they do some I know."

Our groom Hoskins here rode up and ordered the woman to take her hand at once from the young lady's bridle.

"Not at your bidding," she returned, the hard, defiant look coming back into her eyes, which had somewhat softened as they gazed into my sister's, though she never turned her head towards him. "Lady, you are fair, and, it may be, good, as one like me could never be; if so, we may meet again and I may save you from—yourself."

Without another word she relaxed her hold of the bridle and disappeared into the copse.

We rode home quietly, our minds full of the strange adventure. As we neared the house a strong desire came upon me to be able to rush into our mother's presence and tell her all about it. Then a remembrance of her absence, a strange chill and loneliness fell upon me, and I murmured the morning's

motto to myself,—"What is home without a Mother?"

Apparently Helen shared this feeling, for she was unusually thoughtful and depressed. It was evident the morning's adventure had made a deep impression upon her, and she longed for our mother's presence and counsel as much as I did. For that night, at least, our promised confidence was interrupted, and we did not allude again to the other trouble of which we had spoken of when riding.

"What *could* she mean, Helen?" I asked, as memory recalled for the hundredth time the words and appearance of the gipsy.

"Her words were wild and her meaning obscure," was the somewhat evasive answer; but I thought my sister seemed ill at ease, and a look of perplexity was on her fair forehead.

It might be fancy, but that night as I lay awake I thought I heard Helen, who shared my room during our mother's absence, kneeling beside her bed, murmur fervently:

"Lord, save me from myself!"

Could she think there was any meaning in the gipsy's words? or that God endorsed them, as it were; still less, had sent that bold young woman as a messenger from Him? I did not then know how He can "make the wrath of man to praise Him," or speak through a false prophet the words of truth. I forgot how He had used Balaam's ass, or its responsible and guilty master.

And so Helen wanted to be saved from herself! her own dear, loving, pure, true, strong, bright self: the self I loved so well, saw no faults in, and would not have had altered for the world. This was puzzling.

I puzzled over it till I fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRIPLE MYSTERY.

"HELEN, what is yourself?"

I put the question abruptly, yet my sister did not seem taken by surprise, neither did she ask to what it tended. Her own reflections must have chimed in with, or led her immediately to see its drift.

"Come, Connie, you must exercise your own imagination further," she replied with a smile. "Do not make me think for you."

I was silent for such a long time that Helen had to come to my rescue, or relief.

"I suppose there must be more than Shakspeare says, 'item, two eyes grey; two lips indifferent red;'" she added. "Can you not define the rest? What goes to make me up?"

"You are not made up."

"Yes, I am, of component parts, if not in

face and figure," she returned, laughing gaily now. "Tell me what I have besides?"

"Well, mind and manner, and temper—if you have any," I said musingly.

"And tastes, habits, will, affections," she rejoined.

"But how could you be saved from these?"

"I could be saved from their misuse, or ill direction. My tastes might be spoiled, or indulged in a wrong way; my strong will become obstinacy; and my affection be misplaced."

"Are you afraid any of these will happen?"

"I don't know; they might."

Child as I was, and little fitted to be her catechist, she never questioned my assumed right: her eyes met mine with perfect candour, yet not without a shade of trouble. She did not fear to face herself, at all events: I felt she faced herself now in me.

"Do you think the gipsy girl knew how you were made up, or could take you to pieces like this?" I questioned again.

"I don't think she could."

"Then what did she mean?"

"I think she simply meant I was not to have my own way."

"And what do you mean by the same words?"

"The same thing."

I was puzzled again, but not silenced.

"I think it is a grand thing to have one's own way."

"And I think it most miserable."

"Miserable, Helen! Did you feel miserable when you were in the Potential Mood yesterday?"

"My dear little catechist," she replied, laughing, "Bessie's will was mine for the time being, and it was in the sense of being able to control her I felt my power. To be serious now, I want to be wholly guided and restrained by a Will above and beyond myself. I want to have my will so submitted that I can discern instinctively what my Father would have me do, and not let my desires, like a wild horse, run away with me. The way through the desert was very trying to the children of Israel; as they wandered they

cried for many things the Lord saw fit to withhold: nevertheless it could be said, 'He led them by the right way.'"

I was silenced this time but became very busy with my own reflections. Was it her temper my sister wanted to be saved from? She had a very sweet one. Her tastes? They were pure and true. Her habits? They were good and useful. Her affections?——

I did not then know what is the strongest element yet most assailable point in the female character. By her affections it is moulded: through her affections it is ruled.

I did not pursue the latter train of thought at the moment, but then I was a child and—had never read novels!

Later in the day as we sat together hand in hand in the cosiest corner of the cosy inner nest, Helen asked me:

"Connie, of how many parts does the Bible say we are composed?"

I thought for a minute and answered:

"Of body, soul and spirit."

"Right. All that pertains to the body is

simply animal; to the soul belong the intellect and affections, which are wrought upon by the spiritual. Now has every one these?"

"I suppose so," I said.

"And I suppose not."

"Why, Helen, is not every one alike?"

"No, dear; not in this. Only those who are 'born again' have life in Christ, that is, 'are made partakers of the divine nature.' They have a holy principle within, which is heaven begun in the soul now. Such is eternal life. You see every renewed creature is thus a strange 'triple mystery,' darling, or has three natures in one. I will give you a little puzzle to solve, which I met with in the pretty paper now advocating the cause of poor children.*

"'A triple Friend we have on high,
A triple enemy is nigh,
A triple evil sways the mind,
A triple blessing faith can find;
With triple grace the Christian see,
Himself a triple mystery.
Now search and look for the above,
And by their texts these triplets prove.'"

* "The Children's Treasury," edited by Dr. Barnardo.

"Helen," I began again after a pause, "I think you are too sensible for a young girl."

"I am glad to hear you say so," she returned, laughing and kissing me. "I was beginning to fear the opposite was the case."

This brought me back to thinking of herself.

"Helen," I said, renewing my former attack, "I am not very clear what you are, or who you are."

"I see the difficulty I think, love. Listen now: we have, as the puzzle says, a threefold enemy to contend with,—'the world, the flesh, and the devil.' Now which of these do you think it would be the hardest to fight?"

"The devil," I said.

"If soldiers were shut up in a besieged city, which would they have most cause to fear,—the foes without, or traitors within?"

"I would be most afraid of the ones who were near me, and pretended to be my friends," I replied.

"Well, I suppose the world and the devil pretend that, Connie, but the evil principle within,—the old nature,—is a traitor within

the camp, and in indulging it a person may be said to be an enemy to himself. When Luther's friend Melancthon was converted to God, he thought it would be an easy thing to lead a Christian life, but he soon found that 'the old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon.'"

"I don't know what you are talking about, Helen."

"No, dear," she returned, kissing me with a look at once bright and wistful, "but you will—some day."

Ah! that some day; I had said it before to myself. I had made a promise to myself which I meant should be fulfilled—some day.

I think I have forgotten to say we had been brought up strict Presbyterians, my father being an elder of his kirk. Now in the neighbouring town of Loriston had lately been stationed a draft of a Highland regiment, with splendid men who looked most imposing in their tall bonnets and plaids, though I never could admire the drone of the bagpipes, or the music of their pibrochs. There was

another thing I did not admire, and that was their officer. My father, ever "given to hospitality," had invited Captain Murray to our house and shown him no little attention; an invitation to come again and again being readily accepted. He was a handsome strong-built young man, with a bright eye, curling hair, and a good address and bearing, yet in spite of all this I was not attracted by him. He certainly took much notice of me, and some pains indeed to win my favour, but I fancied this was not wholly for my own sake, and that he often desired my absence. Helen, however, kept me constantly by her side, and never let me feel I was overlooked in her gentle courtesy to a stranger. Children are not astute reasoners yet quick discerners of character. I doubted Captain Murray's profession of religion, though he could scarcely smile on the Sabbath, and I had seen him put an open newspaper away on that day as if it were a device of the enemy to ensnare him. I doubted it when he sang the psalms and paraphrases as if lost to all surroundings and

wholly absorbed in the highest service,—the praise of his Creator. I knew I was very wicked to judge him so hardly, for I did judge him, and almost (I may well shrink from acknowledging it), hated him for his treachery and others' trust. My father, sincere and upright himself, never suspected another without sufficient cause: he was too honest to harbour suspicion, my mother too charitable, Helen too guileless. Only I—self-willed, wicked, foolish—distrusted Captain Murray's profession; and perhaps I was prejudiced, perhaps jealous, certainly as I said before, highly fanciful.

Was it through the force of fancy, or by some nice instinct which we can neither analyse nor understand, that in my secret thoughts I connected the gipsy's warning with Captain Murray as well as with Helen, and feared he was knowingly, or unknowingly, exercising some influence over that mysterious, and to me at the time, ill-defined, being herself?

Was it over mind and heart, will or affec-

tions? I might question, but who could tell? Probably Helen knew as little as I did.

I recalled one day soon after our first meeting with Captain Murray, when my sister and I were as usual out riding, and I had lightly exclaimed she would make "a capital officer's wife,"—she coloured deeply, and that bright flush gave me the first strange feeling of vexation.

"You evidently think I could follow a Light Brigade," she replied, laughing. "Know that superior horsewomanship is not required in one who aspires to that honour."

"Honour!" I retorted, "there is no honour in following a red-coat all over the earth. There is no one so grand in all the world as a country gentleman."

"Quite true, little Connie," she responded heartily, and meeting my gaze fearlessly.

It satisfied me then but did not satisfy me now.

Again the longing came upon me to be able to rush into my mother's presence, and in that sanctum her room, let my perplexities and

difficulties find voice, or rather, allow her to gather up my disjointed thoughts and expressions like broken threads and unstrung beads, and weave them into form and give them a shape which I could not define. They were to me vague shadows: my mother never dealt with shadows, but came straight to the point and caught hold of the substance by which they were cast.

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

My mother was absent for several weeks, during which I was dull, impatient, puzzled. I think it was at this time I began to pray. I did not feel any special work of grace in my heart, or realise my need of a Saviour or part in the atonement, but growing perplexity drove me to pour out my secret misgivings into the ear of One willing to listen and able to aid. It may be said God does not regard petitions offered out of Christ, but I am sure He hears the cry of those who, even ignorantly, "feel after Him." Cornelius sought the Lord before he understood the way of salvation, and his "prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God." Even then I believe the Holy Spirit was moving on the face of the deep, and a ray of light entering in the con-

sciousness of weakness and insufficiency, and reliance on the One who could never fail me, or forsake.

In those weeks of quiet reflection we knew that our Aunt Leyne was passing from time into eternity. I often knelt with my sister to pray for her, and our father constantly brought her before us in his daily petitions for the sick and dying. My heart ached sorely for Hope—my little cousin, to whom her mother clung so fondly, and who (mine wrote) seemed stricken with a nerveless despair. Poor Hope, sweet Hope! I would lavish the whole wealth of my tenderness in efforts to divert her from the remembrance of her great sorrow, yet show her how truly and deeply I sympathised. Not one word was said of what she was in person and mind. Ah, how trivial such speculations seemed now. She was a child, an orphan, my cousin; that was enough.

And in those quiet weeks when we saw few visitors, and only Captain Murray called to listen to what we had to tell of the sufferer's

state with a quiet, unobtrusive sympathy, which left me always in a state of self-reproach, or occasionally joined us in our rides, my mind reverted to our mother's early history.

"Helen, you have never told me of our mother's trouble," I began one day, waking up to this fact, and to anxiety once more.

"No, dear; I think we got upon a worse subject,—myself."

"Well, that is—not finished; I have never finished you," I returned, smiling; "but I want to know all you can tell me about mamma, please."

"You ask so prettily I cannot refuse," she replied. "Connie, did you not know we had a brother?"

"I know we had three: two died as babies."

"And one lived to go out into the world."

"But he is dead?" I questioned quickly.

"I do not know."

The answer was given with bated breath, as

if my sister scarcely trusted herself to speak. A great fear fell upon me.

"Helen," I gasped with quivering lips, "he did not do anything wrong?"

"I believe he did not—I am sure he did not," she said, raising her head a little proudly, though tears ran down her cheeks. "I loved him dearly and remember him, Connie."

Truly, through her affections my sister was led: she could not believe ill of one she loved. Another question occurred to me.

"Why did he leave home?"

"He displeased our father, and on being spoken to determinedly (Helen would not say 'severely'), ran away. Perhaps it was foolish and ill-judged."

"Helen, dear, our father could not have done wrong?"

"We will not believe either did wrong, little Connie, until they admit it, and then we must forget it."

I saw now only too clearly our mother's trouble.

"Does not mamma know whether he is alive?" I asked again.

"She does not: he wrote but once."

I did not learn till long afterwards, that the letter to which she alluded had been returned to the writer unopened. Not by our mother: oh no, her heart was true to her absent boy. She did not know of this attempt to regain favour till a year at least had flown: my father probably dreading her entreaties, or willing to spare her needless pain.

"Poor mother!" I sighed, and again, "dear mother!"

"Our own dear mother," echoed my sister, in a murmur of deep affection resembling the coo of a young dove.

Soon after this we heard that dear Aunt Leyne had passed peacefully away, committing her soul to Christ and her little daughter to our parents' care. All for this poor life was over, "the hope, the pain, the sorrow." Well, one day she would not be unknown to me; that is, if I was ever to tread the streets of the New Jerusalem. One thing was certain,

I thought I never could "enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation." I could not suffer and love God: could not be tried and trust Him. I had heard of those who, by the proper endurance of affliction, were "purified, made white, and tried," but when I became a Christian I hoped God would not find it necessary to put me through the same probationary course, or place me in one school with poor Aunt Leyne.

At last my mother's blessed mission was done; her hand had smoothed the dying pillow, her voice whispered parting words of peace. I was told the funeral was over, and they were coming home—the desolate child and she who was to act a parent's part in the future. A few lines from my mother prepared me for the meeting: they were these—

"Connie, darling, do not expect too much, and if you are disappointed do not show it. Love your cousin as your cousin at once: love her in spite of the faults you must expect. Think how you would feel if left alone in the

world as she is. Do not let your heart go half way, but all the way to meet her."

I did not quite understand all this at the time, but resolved to love my cousin if she would let me.

The day of their return came, and for hours we had been expecting them. It was early winter, there was a frostiness in the evening air, and a fire burned brightly not only in the dining-room but in mother's bedroom and mine. My heart beat quickly when I saw from the window our comfortable close carriage roll up to the door, and in the next minute I was in my mother's embrace.

She released me soon and pointed to a little girl behind her. I put my arms round her too, but she turned her head suddenly aside, and I kissed her on the cheek instead of the lips. Instinctively I felt chilled, but at the same moment my mother's words occurred to me, and I drew our young cousin into the warm dining-room while I began to take off her wraps. She made no effort to help or hinder: I might as well have been unveiling

a statue. "Does she mean me to attend altogether upon her?" was the indignant thought in my mind, but I checked it as it rose.

No marble I had ever seen or heard of was like the face and form revealed in payment for my pains. Hope, my fancied sweet, fairy-like cousin, stood before me as a girl with heavy black, lustreless eyes, a quantity of black curls, and a sallow, unhealthy complexion. I seemed to hear the words again, "If you are disappointed do not show it," and strove to check the feeling of dismay, or at least restrain its evidence.

"Come to the fire, my child," said my mother's cheery voice. (She had come, as usual, to my relief.)

Hope obeyed mechanically, without a word or gesture of interest. She stood a little aside, though I had touched her hands and they were icy cold.

"You must be tired," I said.

"No," was the curt answer.

"Was the journey long?"

"Very long."

"I suppose you were glad when it was over."

"No."

"Everything will seem strange to you at first."

"Yes."

Well, *I* was chilled, at all events, and made no further attempts to converse.

That night as we were retiring to rest mother called me into her room, leaving Hope with Helen in mine. My mother took me into her arms and drew me down upon her lap.

"A great baby!" I laughed.

"Yes," she said, "my baby."

There was the least touch of reproach mingled with undoubted tenderness in her tone.

"Connie," she then whispered, "who bids us learn of Him?"

"The Lord Jesus," I replied, feeling too seriously for a common evasion.

"Before He could invite us to come to Him what had He to do?"

I hesitated: I knew He had to die, but the

answer would not exactly convey what my mother meant just then. She altered her query.

"Did He come part of the way from His bright throne above, and bid us come up the rest of the way to meet Him?"

"No," I replied decidedly, "for He knew we could not do that. The Bible says we were 'without strength.' He came to where we were lost to look for us."

"Even so, my child; He came into our place of ruin, degradation, and misery. He took our nature upon Him. 'Himself bare our sickness and carried our sorrows.' He identified Himself with us, and now by the power of a living sympathy can 'be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.' In this He bids us learn of Him."

I understood her readily.

"But she will not let me love her," I complained.

"He loved us before we loved Him."

"Ah, mother, do you think we can make ourselves love anybody?"

My mother smiled.

"I don't believe in working up an affection," she returned, "whether earthly, or heavenly. Don't think about the affection; think about the object who claims it. If the Lord,—from dwelling upon His perfections you will involuntarily render Him your heart. Where there are no perfections there may be claims upon your pity, forbearance, tenderness. Do as the Lord did,—go all the way to the lone, lost, it may be, unlovely one; identify yourself with her in her trial, make her sorrows your own; then let your young warm heart speak out."

"But, mother," I pleaded, "it is hard for me to feel as I ought, for I never had a sorrow in all my life, you know."

And my dear mother kissed me, saying, "God keep you so, my child."

Something in her tone conveyed the impression that she was not exempt from suffering.

"Mother, you have trouble," I said unthinkingly.

A spasm of extreme pain crossed her face, and she answered with a quivering lip:

"I think my darling knows; but better still, my Father knows."

She then kissed and released me. I went back to my room with a trouble beginning to stir in the heart in which I had lately boasted trouble was unknown. This was something more than mere disappointment; for I felt acute pain at the thought that my beloved mother was bearing uncomplainingly a hidden burden. Through all her care for us, her ready sympathy, and entering into every detail and particular of daily life; through her grand upholding of her husband's influence, there lay deep in her breast this sore yearning for an absent loved one,—a fervent but unblessed affection. Yet I should not have looked upon it as unblessed, for as I have since read,

"Affection never is wasted."

I had great faith in my mother's prayers; and though her love might only bring her sorrow, would not have had her indifferent to her

absent son. All my late chagrin faded into insignificance, and a deep admiration for my mother's strength of character, almost of wonder at finding a heart could be so much

"At leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise,"

possessed me as I entered my own room. Helen kissed me, bidding me in a whisper to "be patient and forbear." Then she kissed Hope, and for the first time my cousin and I were left alone.

I was not inclined to converse, so we undressed in silence. I knelt by my bedside, and oh, it was such a relief to pour forth my newly reviving trouble into my Father's ear.

I did not need to be told to go all the way to meet my mother in hers. I was constrained by love to do so.

I suppose I remained what appeared a very long time on my knees, for when I arose Hope said in a cold, almost disdainful tone,

"I did not think *you* had anything to pray for."

"Have you?" I asked.

"No," she rejoined decidedly.

"Then why did you kneel just now?"

I had seen her bend beside her bed as I had bent by mine.

There was a short silence. It was evident she was trying to tide back some strong emotion and steadying her voice to answer. Then she said briefly and almost sternly,

"Only because I promised mamma."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ENMITY OF THE HEART.

My bed, with its pretty light drapery, was in one corner of the room, Hope's in another. Not a word was spoken after her brief confession, and all efforts at consolation on my part failed. I knew they would have been futile, and shrank from the idea of an ungracious reply. I lay awake for an unusually long time, surprised and pained, and when at length I fell asleep my dreams very naturally took form and colouring from my waking thoughts.

I dreamt I stood with my mother on a hillside which was bathed in golden sunlight. Its rays were not scorching but clear and mild. Suddenly as we stood there,—I in a kind of dreamy contemplation,—a mist stole up from the valley and wrapped my mother

round in its cold and gloomy wreaths. Thus I was separated from her, for I still stood in the light. A great fear came upon me, a great yearning possessed my heart, and with a low, quivering cry, I burst through the gloom and clasped her hand once more. The glorious sunshine faded, I felt chilled and uncomfortable; yet more satisfied than without, because my heart rested in the consciousness of being near the parent I loved so well. I had lost the brightness and the beauty, but I was *with* her amidst the shadows.

I awoke with a strange, numbed sensation in my limbs, almost amounting to pain. At first I fancied a window had been left open, through which the cold air came, but soon remembered this was not the case. A long, quivering breath, however, seemed to sound in the room, not unlike the sighing of the night wind, and for the minute forgetting who was there, my heart stood still. I was not naturally nervous; I had not been cruelly and wickedly frightened in infancy by tales of hobgoblins and such like, and did not in

the least believe in the re-appearance of disembodied spirits for the sole purpose of frightening people out of their wits; so without reference to them, I cast in my mind what this could mean. Another instant and a second stifled sob and the smothered wail —"O mamma! mamma!" enlightened me. It was my cousin's voice.

"Hope," I softly called, "are you awake?"

There was no answer.

"O Hope!" I continued, "speak to me. I do *so* feel for you. I love you now, Hope; indeed I do. I only tried to love you this evening, but I really do now."

A voice tremulous with weeping answered me with passionate words.

"I do not want your love. I want nothing you can give me."

"Why not?" I inquired. "Why are you so hard to me?"

"You are away from me in your high, easy place. You do not know what I have lost, or what I feel. You try to like me because you ought, but don't really feel a bit of it.

I don't want your make-believe love: I tell you now I hate you."

I was stricken dumb: such an amount of venom in any heart I failed to understand. I never had the latent evil of my own thoroughly drawn out and made manifest. What did I do, my reader? Just what I ought not to have done. With wounded self-love, with regret for my kindly efforts, with sore resentment burning in my heart, I turned on my side and left the lonely, sorrow-stricken orphan to her own bitter grief and complaint. And yet even as I did so conscience upbraided me, and the Spirit of God brought one verse to my remembrance. It was this:—"Haters of God."

Was it possible that people were hating God? and instead of turning away and leaving them to perish, or sweeping them from His presence altogether, through the grandest sacrifice that could be imagined He had opened a way of reconciliation, and by grace brought the rebels nigh to Himself? "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God

by the death of His Son." Was I who had heard of the Gospel remedy from infancy, and whose family owed so much to it, now dealing in grace? My mother had explained the meaning of the term to me, and I knew I was not, but my heart was hot and vengeful, and I stifled the whispers of peace.

The next day I sought to be alone with my mother.

"Mother," I began after some conversation upon other matters, "there is a verse in the Bible which says we were enemies of God. Surely every one is not that?"

"Every one is not, for grace has made some to differ, and they are 'pardoned, reconciled.' But terrible to relate, every heart is capable of hating God."

"I cannot think that," I broke in; "I am sure I never hated Him."

"Because you were brought up in His fear, and His love was early instilled into your mind. But have you loved Him? Do you wish to have Him ever in remembrance? If not, know that your heart is not a bit better

than those whose evil has not been restrained by circumstances, and is still a 'stranger to grace and to God.' The wickedness in yours may never have been fully developed, but only in conversion can be restrained by the actings of a new nature. Have I not told you of the holy man John Bradford, who seeing a criminal led to execution, exclaimed, 'There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God!'"

After this I was very much humbled, for I thought if I was capable of hating the holy and infinitely gracious God but for His own restraining mercy, it was no wonder my cousin hated me.

Still this did not make me more lenient towards her. From the moment in which she so bitterly retorted, I ceased to care for her, and took no pains to conceal my indifference. I no longer tried to win an entrance to that cold young heart; it had proved too strong for me, I said to myself in excuse. I did think there was a softening and relenting towards Helen, but to her only. Helen's

manner to her young cousin was peculiar. She never appeared to wish to sympathise, or seemed conscious of doing a kindness, but there was a delicate consideration in every action—almost in every word, which could not fail to make itself felt. Hope was not proof against it. I saw that as water wears away stones, so this gentle under-current of kindly feeling was wearing off the hard crust of insensibility, or morbid dwelling upon grief. I felt sure Helen would win and Hope succumb.

Our cousin's entrance into our family did not increase our happiness in any way. To me her presence was a disturbing element in the household arrangements. I felt impatient at having her comfort constantly considered, wickedly jealous of any attention shown to her, and fretful and resentful as I observed her sullen temper. I often wished she had been provided for in some other way, and bitterly regretted her mother's claim upon the love of mine.

I knew my mother discerned the feeling

which had arisen between us, without any regular explanation, for Hope was removed from my room to Helen's. My mother looked grieved when she came in to see how the change had been effected, but truth to say, I was considerably relieved by the removal.

CHAPTER VII.

A WOODLAND RAMBLE.

"HELEN, I want to be alone with you: altogether alone, you know. I don't wish to have some one who does not care for us listening to and measuring every word."

"By what line?" asked my sister quietly.

I looked up in surprise, for her meaning was not obvious.

"The idea of measurement would imply interest and a standard, Connie."

"Well, don't imply anything," I replied, laughing, "but come with me for a good long walk."

I felt as if only in the open air and free from all restraint and a disagreeable presence could I breathe freely. She was soon ready and we issued forth.

"Helen, I love you."

"I feel as if everything around us was saying the same thing," rejoined my sister with a very bright smile.

It seemed as if the sunshine without left its reflex on her "bonny" face. Ah, she had no envyings or misgivings, but was happy in her Father's love.

"I don't want any one to come between us, or make me fear your being drawn away from me, or I removed from you," I continued.

"I don't think that can ever happen, darling," she replied more seriously. "Connie, your fancies torment you."

They undoubtedly did torment me at that moment, for almost as she spoke a step sounded behind us, and a gentleman lifted his hat as he appeared at our side.

"May I have the pleasure of joining you in your walk?" Captain Murray asked, bending towards Helen, whose slightly heightened colour seemed to avow the pleasure would not be wholly on his side.

I bit my lip for reply. I don't think many things escaped the Captain's notice, though his eye did not always rest upon the object under consideration. It did not rest upon me now, yet I felt I was thoroughly read and understood. Not laid aside, however; I afterwards found I was rather to be taken up as an interesting study.

"How delicious is the breeze from the hills," he said. "One gets so cramped up in barrack life."

"You do not look as if you could be cramped up anywhere," I put in, looking, but not with favour, on his well-knit, muscular figure.

"You think I should break down all opposing barriers?" he questioned with an amused expression.

"Or remove them some way," I rejoined, for at the moment something stronger in the man than mere physical power, it may be the acknowledgment of a strong will, or indomitable perseverance, made itself felt by me, and I knew, without argument, that it would carry

its point the more keenly and determinedly for opposition. His eye met mine with a searching glance, then he said quietly to Helen,

"Your little sister is a subtle reasoner, Miss Munro."

"Or rather a quick observer," she replied.

"You are right," he said again, and it is impossible exactly to convey *how* the words were spoken. There was a bending of a strong will and intellect to her judgment, almost a tender acknowledgment of her decision, as if she must be always right, which I know now was flattering to so young a girl. "A quick discernment and instinct leads some to a conclusion to which intellect and reason more slowly traces its way. Here are what the poet recognises as reasoners:

'The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red, nor white, had stolen of both.'"*

He stretched out his hand as he spoke and picked a beautiful spray of wild roses which

* Shakspeare.

grew above our heads, overhanging the road-side. Helen received it with pleasure. Our road had led down a steep decline skirting the copse of which we have before spoken, and almost unconsciously we took a turning towards a romantic defile where the "hawthorn and hazel mingled," and roses white and pink, twined with the scarlet berries of the bryony, the woodbine, humble bramble blossoms, and dark-leaved parasite—the ivy.

"It reminds me of my native scenes and boyhood's days," Captain Murray said, again quoting:

> "One of those heavenly days that cannot die,
> When in the eagerness of boyish hope
> I left our cottage threshold, sallying forth
> With a huge wallet o'er my shoulder slung,
> A nutting crook in hand, and turned my steps
> Tow'rd some far distant wood."*

"I am sorry the nuts are not ripe, young ladies."

"Did you ever burn nuts, Captain Murray?" I asked.

* Wordsworth.

"I must plead guilty to the weakness, Miss Constance," he returned. "You know it is one of our Hallowe'en practices. Were you ever fortunate enough to find two nuts in one shell? It is much like finding a four-leaved shamrock to the Irishman,—a lucky sign, and charm against witchcraft."

"We might need such here," said Helen. "Do you know, Captain Murray, there is an encampment of gipsies near, and one of them offered to forecast the future for me?"

"Indeed! and what did she promise?—'a dark man, a little good to yourself, and some trouble to the family.'"

"No; I told her I did not believe in her power, and would not trust her art."

"Quite right," he rejoined, "such miserable attempts to map out a destiny are temptings of Providence, and often induce the evil it presumes to foresee. But to return to our plant. In the Highlands the hazel is looked upon with some degree of the veneration with which the ancient Britons regarded the

mistletoe, because its rods were used for divining:

"Of old, enchanters sought its aid,
Earth's hidden wealth to see;
And magic wand in wizard hand
Of hazel bough must be.

"And merry maidens fond believe,
That in the nut-brown shell
There lurks a power on Hallowe'en,
Of happy homes to tell.

"And well I trow, can nut, or bough,
Wise secrets still unfold,
Of witching charms, as potent now
As in those times of old.

"A gentle grace, a modest mien,
A heart that must be sought;
By these the parent ore is seen,
And lasting spells are wrought." *

The intonation was perfect, and conveyed of itself the very thoughts of the poets whom he quoted so freely. As he concluded he bent towards Helen whose eyes were cast down, but I knew the look there was in their quiet depths: I had seen it there before. All at once, right in the middle of our path, which had considerably narrowed, there stood the

* Wordsworth.

figure of the gipsy. I don't think the others noticed from whence she came: certainly I did not. Her arms hung by her side and she fixed her eyes with a bold, defiant stare upon Captain Murray. The gaze deepened in intensity; the fine lips curled in scorn; she glanced for a moment at my sister, and without a word was gone.

"Is that your fortune-teller?" asked our escort. "She looks bold enough to practise witchcraft, or any lying device, but is a fine type of *Il Gitana* certainly."

"Yes," answered Helen; "her manner, as much as what she said, impressed me the other day in spite of myself."

"Do not let it affect you, it is but the trick and cant of her trade, and will be pressed home if indulged. I beg you will not allow her to address you again; you are not equal to dealing with such as she is."

In his care of her his manner was earnest almost to eagerness, and I saw it was not without effect upon Helen, though she only said,

"I never give an unqualified promise."

I fancied he was not satisfied, nay more, even a little displeased; but he did not pursue the subject, only turned to me exclaiming lightly,

"The fairies love you, Miss Constance."

"How? or why?" I asked.

"I observed you would not tread on one of their favourite clusters just now," and again he quoted:

"And then she heard a little voice,
Shrill as the midge's wing,
That spake aloud—'A human child
Is here—yet mark the thing!

"'The lady fern is all unbroke,
The strawberry flower unta'en;
What shall we do for her who still
From mischief can refrain?'

"'Give her a fairy cake,' said one;
'Grant her a wish,' said three;
'The latest wish that she hath wished,'
Said all, 'whate'er it be.'"*

As he concluded I glanced at my sister, for there arose in my mind a remembrance of my

* Mary Howitt.

latest wish—to be alone with her. I could see she recollected it also, for she answered my look with one at once apologetic and amused. I had almost forgiven his disagreeable intrusion, until recalled still more strongly to it by his quiet question,

"Did your sister share in your wish, Miss Constance?"

"Why do you think she knew what it was?" I returned, answering his question by another.

"I know it was about her."

I turned on him abruptly.

"I don't think you need the hazel rod, Captain Murray."

He laughed: perhaps he was willing I should believe in his power, or admire his discrimination. I did not then consider that my quick look at my sister revealed to him the fact of my wish being about her, while hers, half shy and deprecatory, told she had failed to share in it. How much more he discerned I am not prepared to say.

"I shall always remember this as a day

with the poets," Helen said, as at last we bent our steps homeward.

"Have you enjoyed it?" Captain Murray asked.

"Very much," she replied, looking down at the beautiful wild rose spray she still held.

"It was only a brief portion of a day with a humble admirer," he rejoined in a very low tone; "too brief for one."

He did not say whether an admirer of the poets or of her, but though his words might have borne either meaning, his tone gave them fuller significance. Again the delicate colour flitted over Helen's face, and I turned away in displeasure. I now remember that Captain Murray was generally guarded in speech, so that little could be made of his expressions afterwards, while the well-modulated voice, the apparently insignificant gesture which gave them force, might not be imitated. His feelings were not only under perfect control, but he was like the

oracle of which I have read, whose answers would bear different renderings. I always felt he was impenetrable: one whom you might know for years and years, and yet know nothing of at the end. Perhaps in this he was a type of native shrewdness and caution: "a canny Scot." Of course he admired my sister: who could help it? She might well be the fulfilment of any man's ideal: the type of everything fair and true in woman.

Without these reasonings all my prejudice against him revived, and I began ungratefully to charge him with drawing upon the stores of memory to allure as well as entertain. I am sure the fairies did not love me then, for I planted my foot firmly upon a rich clump of moss and fern, through which peeped "the strawberry of the wilderness," while I dragged down a low-hanging branch of the nearest tree, and having broken off a rod, snapped it into a dozen fragments and threw it away. Having given vent to sundry little evidences of displeasure of the same kind, I turned to join my

companions, but they were not in sight. They had passed on and rounded a corner of the woody dell while I was loitering. At the same moment a hand was placed tightly on my mouth, something close and heavy was wrapped round my head, and I was lifted suddenly from the ground by what seemed to me, even in terror, a man's strong arm. I plunged and struggled violently, but to no purpose, and my attempts to utter my sister's name were stifled by the vile folds which bound me. A rapid motion, a rush and a leap, a bending and creaking in which my head was kept low by something strong being pressed upon it; that was all I knew.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GREENWOOD.

"RAY, set her down."

Such were the first words I heard as quick and skilful fingers untwisted the coils from my head and throat, and I found myself once more at liberty. I did not scream or cry; my struggles for the time were over; but with the calmness of despair I looked around.

Yet not altogether despair. I knew now that I was kidnapped: I had read stories of children who were, and quite understood the fulness of the calamity. I was away from home and friends, separated from the mother and sister I loved so well, yet a hope awoke in my heart; one assurance alone sustained my fainting soul and gave me

courage,—it was that my father would find me.

What! could I be within reach of him who had such influence in the country, whose name was feared by evil-doers, and respected by all, and not be rescued? He was skilful and ingenious, sound in judgment, prompt in action: could I be close to him,—in the same neighbourhood, in short, and remain undiscovered? As the thought possessed me my calmness grew with it, and I was able to observe where I was, and leisurely face my situation with all its difficulties.

I was in a wide clearing which would have looked like a common, but that it was fenced in by a wood so thick and dense on all sides I could not discern any path by which I had been brought thither. At one side of the open space a large fire was blazing, while a huge pot, suspended from a triangular stand in true gipsy-fashion, like a pretty toy on my dressing-table at home, only being on a gigantic scale, was tended by an old beldame

such as the story-books always bring in for the abduction of children. She was not my kidnapper, however; a tall, strong, swarthy youth did not withdraw the arm that had carried me so swiftly along, until the last fold of a heavy shawl had been removed from my shoulders, and thrown to the ground at an imperious gesture of the young woman who had addressed my sister when on horseback. Then I was trusted to stand alone and commenced my observations. A group of half-clad nut-brown children ceased their play to eye me curiously, but the basket-makers, mat-weavers, and others did not suspend their employment, though they glanced around. The greatest event in all the world to me—the fact of my having been stolen away—was of little import to them. I could scarcely fancy it could be so little: it seemed as if all the world should stand still, or rather rise in virtuous indignation to see the outrage that had been committed.

There were but two tents, one larger than

the other. They looked stable enough, and as if, like their owners, they had grown to a dusky brown from long exposure to fair weather and foul. Of their comfort I could not judge, but they certainly increased the picturesque effect of the scene.

My eyes came back from their roving to the girl I had first seen, and whose air and gesture betokened influence and command. It seemed as if my having known her before, and my sister's forbearance and gentleness when she stayed our course, gave me a sort of claim on her attention.

"Did you know I was being brought here? Did you know I was stolen away from my sister?" I asked.

"Yes," she returned with haughty carelessness, "I did it."

The swarthy youth was about to interrupt, but she checked him by a sign. "Let me bear the blame," she said, "it is better so."

At that moment a weary sigh came from

the smaller tent near which we stood, then a prolonged fit of coughing, after which a faint voice called "Madge!"

The girl turned without a word to enter the tent, catching my hand and drawing me after her. At first on emerging from the bright sunlight without I could not see distinctly amid the shadows within. The gipsy girl released me suddenly. I rubbed my eyes with the freed hand and began to discern more clearly.

On a light and not inelegant couch of wicker-work, the upper part covered with soft skins, lay another young girl of a pale, sallow complexion, with long bony fingers pressed on her forehead, over which hung a heavy cloud of black hair. She tossed it back impatiently and then I saw her eyes—large, dark, and luminous, but with such a longing, hungry look as I had never seen in human face before. They were like those of a wounded deer; frightened, imploring, yet full of sad intelligence. As they turned upon me I could

scarcely bear their expression, yet could not seek release. They fascinated me then, and the recollection haunted me for many a month afterwards. The girl who had brought me there, now bent over the couch with a manner so subdued that it altered her whole appearance. I was not afraid of her in this new, soft mood.

"Madge, who is this?" asked a weary voice.

Despite a slight hoarseness the voice was naturally musical, like the rippling of water, and thrilled me even in its weariness, as the gaze had done.

"A child who has been lost."

I listened to the lying reply in indignant silence.

"Come here, child," moaned the invalid, "but oh, I don't want you. I want to go out into the open air, into the warm sunshine, under the fine old shade of the trees once more, and be what you are. Yet never like you—never like you: the heart is sick, the

feet weary, the joy has died out of my life."

She clasped her hands together and flung her arms above her head. The loose sleeves of an old robe fell back and showed the wasted arms beneath. Without a word the girl called Madge drew herself up to her full height, and her eyes glittered with their hard, defiant expression once more. She clutched my arm so firmly that I could scarcely refrain from calling out, and drew me back into the open air again, and away to a quiet corner of the camp under the shadows of the grand old trees.

"She is dying," she said hoarsely, "she will never be well; never go out into the bright sunshine again. It does not need a fortune-teller to reveal that. I have told many lies in my time, I have scarcely ever told the truth, but she did; she was better than I, and I am telling it now at last. I would die to save her or give her ease, for I cared for no one else on earth; but as quick

as I am at picking up things, I cannot find out a secret for this. You heard what she said just now. Girl, do you know who has brought her to this?"

"No," I whispered wonderingly, frightened at her vehemence.

"Him—I can't name him—who smiles down into your sister's face and makes the pretty pink colour come and go. Him who took your hand just now to lift you over the fence. Him—the betrayer, the murderer, the false, false black liar. Oh! I could have struck him where he stood to-day, and let his cold eye fall on me as if he did not know who I was, and had never seen me before. I wonder I didn't kill him, for the false are ever cowards at heart. Little lady, you would be afraid of one of our black gang, but I tell you the lad who carried you here at my bidding would not act as meanly and treacherously as the pretended gentleman has done. I hate him—I hate him, and will curse him to my dying day!"

I shuddered to hear imprecations to which I was a stranger, but at the same time could not wholly repress a little wicked satisfaction at having my judgment thus confirmed. I found courage to answer,

"If Captain Murray has made your sister sick, he is no gentleman, but a bad, bad man. I don't like him, but can't see how he is as wicked as you say."

She caught hold of a few of my words.

"You don't like him," she said, "but your sister likes him."

"I don't know what it is to you," I replied sturdily, "but I hope not."

"Is your sister good?"

"As good as she is pretty."

"Would she give pain to a poor girl?"

"Not for all the world: not for ten thousand worlds."

"I had you stolen away here to fret her." She said these words reluctantly, and as if half ashamed of the confession.

"Then you did a wicked thing," I returned,

giving vent to my indignation as her regretful manner emboldened me, "but my father will find me out."

"Do not be too sure of that, little lady," she rejoined with a smile. "If I wished, as easily as you were brought here I could pass you on to where no one could find you without our aid. You are a brave lassie though, and I like your spirit. If you had whimpered I should not pity you; but you kept up your courage and faced me so boldly I will not see any harm come to you. Now let me tell you something you don't know. You have a brother."

"I had."

"You have," she repeated decidedly. "When shadows are within and without he will appear: when the heart is heavy he will make it glad." She seized my hand. "The line of life is crossed by another; trouble will come upon you through one you love well. Take courage; out of that trouble you will be brought, and in it will gain a friend."

"I don't think I ought to listen to you," I interrupted; "my sister would not, I am sure. You are only pretending, and to pretend is wrong. No one can tell beforehand what will happen but God."

"Shall I tell you of the past, then, young lady?" inquired the girl, with a disagreeable smile. "Shall I tell you of a death in the family lately, of an enemy in your own house, of tears in your own room, of your happiness clouded and spoiled?"

How much of this was mere surmise, how much information concerning our family she had picked up in the neighbourhood, shrewdly drawing deductions, or attaching consequences thereto, in true gipsy fashion, I am not prepared to say. Suffice it to add, it impressed me as she intended, and when she wound up with a few (no doubt) familiar expressions, which sounded to me very much like the Proverbs of Solomon, the charm was complete. As well as I can recall they were such as these:

"The lips of a fool may give wisdom to the wise. The wise will receive the vision and give heed to the warning, so they may get understanding. There are things around thou canst not understand, but the stars reveal and secrets are borne to the ears that are open and attend. Ask thy parents and they will tell thee that wise women ever have been chosen, and given power to make known the decrees of fate."

Having sufficiently impressed me with her revelations, she changed her tone again abruptly and asked,

"Do you love your sister?"

"Dearly," I answered.

"Then I will save her for your sake from herself and—him. Would she come here?"

I hesitated. I was sure my father would not allow her to do so: I was as certain she would not venture without his knowledge and consent. She saw my reluctance to speak, and again taking my hand drew me into the

tent. Perhaps she thought thus to work upon my feelings.

The invalid had changed her position. She was now sitting up with hands clasped at the back of her head, rocking herself to and fro. Why is it that in sickness and sorrow the fingers meet so naturally? Is it in mute appeal? Why is it that in suffering of any kind the hardest thing is to "be still?" As I have since read

> "We change our posture o'er and o'er,
> But cannot soothe or cheat our woe."

"Madge," wailed the poor girl, "I don't want to get well. I can never be as I once was: but I want still less to die as I have seen others do. Oh! it was terrible to see them going away they didn't know where, only the sooner they were out of pain the better, yet afraid it wasn't the end of them. The other world is so cold and dark and empty, and there isn't a bit of light. Oh! can no one make it easier to die?"

I was brought face to face for the first time

with a Christless soul on a death-bed, and "a horror as of great darkness" fell upon me. I realised how awful it was to stand shivering upon the verge of eternity without hope and unprepared. Death rolled before me as a dark flood indeed, but where was the only Friend who could take the sufferer's trembling hand and bear her safely over? I knew any absent member of my family might bring comfort to the fainting spirit, and that I was the only one who dared not bid her "look to Jesus and live," because I knew Him not myself. I sprang forward and seized her hand.

"Send me back," I exclaimed, "send me back safely, and my sister shall come to you. She will teach you how to die."

"Teach me how to die! I can't die—I won't!" she burst out with sudden energy. Then after a terrible fit of coughing: "Bring her—bring her quickly: bring any one who can make it easier to die."

Was it the sigh of my own heart, the

echo of a voice newly awakened there, but which never could be stilled again, which spoke right out in that strange chamber of woe? or was it a blessed utterance from heaven like the ray of light so longed for:

"Only Jesus can do that!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAY OF LIFE.

"ONLY Jesus can do that!"

I turned at the voice and beheld stooping to enter the low door of the tent, a young gentleman whose grave but kindly appearance induced confidence. He advanced at once to the couch of the sufferer, and taking her wasted hand in his, said gently,

"My poor girl, I see you are very ill. I am a doctor brought here to try and relieve."

He pushed up the loose sleeve which had fallen over her hand and put his fingers on her wrist. There was something strangely soothing in his every look and movement; an assurance of sympathy; and the girl lay still, only her hungry eyes devoured his face as if there to read her fate.

"My poor girl, I see you are very ill."—*Page* 98.

"Tell me the truth," she whispered, "don't be afraid to tell the truth. Can I get well?"

"You are sick in body and in soul," he replied with the tenderness of a woman, "but the last is the most deadly. For that I bring a remedy."

I knew then as well as if he had told her, that all hope of recovery was over and she was passing away from earth. I felt also that the secret of peace which I longed to communicate was known to him, and he could guide the anxious soul into "the way of life."

Having administered a restorative from a phial that he carried in his pocket, the doctor began as if there was not a moment to be lost.

"From His throne of light above down to earth God sent His beloved Son that He might die, 'the just for the unjust,' to make an atonement for sin, purchase our pardon, and raise us to holiness with Himself. 'All

we like sheep have gone astray.' Now say it after me, and try to get the meaning of the words we utter."

She obeyed his bidding immediately, and the sweet voice repeated as an echo,

"'All we like sheep have gone astray,'—where?" she questioned.

"Astray from God: in sin."

"'We have turned every one to his own way.' Ah, I took my own way to my shame and sorrow," she sighed. "'And the Lord hath laid on Him'—on who?"

"On His Son—the Lord Jesus Christ."

"'The iniquity of us all?'"

"That is the sins you and I have committed; the iniquity of every one who accepts His salvation and believes this message."

"Do you know what I am?" she asked.

"I do," he replied more gently, if possible, than before, "a sinner."

"And was all my badness and blackness put down to Him you speak of?"

"He was judged as if it was His own."

"And I never knew it," she exclaimed wistfully, tears gathering in her dark eyes. "I never knew it. He must not think hardly of me because I never thought of all He had done for me, or thanked Him for it,* but I never knew it. Where is He now?"

"Alive from the dead and up in heaven, but He can see and hear us on earth. He led me here to-day."

"Would He hear you if you told Him I never knew it, and asked Him to forgive me?"

"Ay, that He would. Let us pray."

He knelt beside the dying girl, and in the simplest, plainest words laid her case before his Almighty Father. He confessed her ignorance and indifference, pleaded for pardon and peace, for light in the dark valley, for dying grace. I knelt, too, at the foot of the bed, and every word he uttered went up as a petition from my own heart and for myself. Truly, "the sword of the Spirit"

* See tract—"I never thanked Him."

was two-edged that day in more senses than one, for it cut both ways. Two hearts were convicted, two souls converted, two sinners, erewhile lost and straying, were brought into the fold of the Good Shepherd. The poor untaught dweller in a gipsy camp, and I—the little lady, absent from my rich home and friends, were smitten at the same moment by the word of God's faithful messenger; brought into light and liberty through the Gospel, our feet set in "the way of life." Not in vain had I been brought thither. It was no miserable mistake; no chance outrage arising from private spleen; or rather, (for the sin of my captors was none the less), God who causeth even "the wrath of man to praise Him," had graciously overruled, and made it all "work together" for my eternal good.

How long I knelt there I cannot tell. I did not arise when the earnest voice ceased pleading, but remained with my head bowed upon my hands while tears coursed freely. I felt as if I could never leave the feet of the

dear Saviour I had found, or rather, who had found me when I sought Him not. I heard the quiet voice go on to tell of "a woman who was a sinner," who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears when He was on earth, and He did not draw back from her unholy touch, or order her to leave the place immediately, but graciously said, "Thy sins are forgiven!" and bade her "go in peace." I knew this story almost as well as the gentleman did, and could have repeated it parrot-like, with a heart unmoved; but it never seemed as if I had taken my place with the woman in her loneliness and shame until now. Oh! with what deep meaning was the message now fraught,—"When they had nothing to pay He frankly forgave them *both!*" The self-righteous Pharisee, well brought up and instructed, and the poor outcast, on one broad level, in one condition,—bankrupt: needing and meeting the same rich grace; with nothing—absolutely "nothing to pay;" yet forgiven!

Then our patient teacher went on to tell

of a little girl who, though she was dead, yet heard the voice of the Lord and lived at His bidding. He spoke of the resurrection day, when those who loved Christ here would know and love each other for ever. When he ceased at last, I felt his hand upon my bowed head but could not look up.

"My child, how came you here?" he asked.

I raised my head suddenly but was checked by Madge in my reply.

"She will not say to our hurt, you will not ask how or why she came here," she said hoarsely. "She shall go back with you."

I rose to my feet and placed my hand without misgiving in the doctor's. He drew me to the side of the dying girl. Her thin fingers were clasped over her eyes, but through them large tears were welling. She removed them at length, and oh, what a change was apparent!

On that worn face the peace of God was

resting; His seal divine seemed truly set on the calm forehead: the eyes shone with a radiant light, while round her mouth a smile, almost child-like in its sweetness, was playing.

"Oh," she exclaimed in a tone of gladness, "He has made it easy to die. He will never hear the end of it. For ever and for ever I will praise Him for letting me know of His love at last, and for being punished instead of me." The gentleman took her hand and held it between both his own as he might have done a sister's.

"You are not afraid?" he asked.

"Who could be afraid with Him?" was the exultant answer.

I heard him murmur a fervent "Thank God!" and then some words like these, "And there are many such!" I suppose now, he was thinking of other lost ones.

The girl held out her disengaged hand to me. An impulse came so strongly upon me I did not try to resist it. Without waiting

to reflect upon what she was, or had been, I exclaimed with a sob,

"Will you let me kiss you?"

She looked very much surprised, even startled, and a faint colour rose to her cheek. Then a yearning look came into her eyes, she drew herself up suddenly, and flinging both her wasted arms round my neck pressed a kiss upon my cheek. After this she lay down as quietly as if she was a weary child going to rest.

I never knew her name or history; I never saw her more: but in a brighter world above I know I shall meet that wondrous gaze again, when we awake up in His likeness who that day united us in an undying bond. Being near Him we shall be near each other: loving Him we shall love one another. She may have been a sinful girl; so am I: but (all glory to His grace!) we shall stand "faultless" before the throne of God, singing the song of the redeemed—"Unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood!"

Few words passed between Madge and me as we were consigned to the guidance of the lad who had brought me into the camp, for a more peaceable departure. She only said,

"Little lady, we may meet again; but you have looked your last at her."

"No," put in the doctor who overheard the remark, "they have not looked their last: they will have a joyful meeting. Will you be there to see? the way is open to you."

She did not reply, but her whole demeanour was quiet and strangely respectful as she walked with us to the edge of the wood, where a narrow path, hitherto unperceived by me, lay before us like a twisted line. Then she caught the grave physician's hand and put it to her lips.

"The gipsy girl does not idly offer thanks," she whispered, "but thank you from my heart for the ease you have given to her."

He gave her the small bottle he carried, telling her how to use it, with a few general directions. Then I turned for a parting survey

of the gipsy camp, and the tent of which it may have been recorded, "This and that were born there," and we were under the shadow of the trees which formed a roof overhead, treading the darkening path to life and liberty.

CHAPTER X.

BROUGHT HOME.

Our path widened as we proceeded into a clear, shady lane, easy to traverse and pleasant to tread. Several narrower paths intersected it, by one of which I had probably been conveyed to the camp. My companion never let my hand go but held it in a firm, assuring clasp, which said as plainly as words could do, that I was in safe keeping and need not fear. We were silent for a long time, but as he felt me start and tremble when a hare darted across our path, he said,

"There is no cause for alarm, Miss Munro."

"How do you know my name?" I asked.

"Ah, that is easily accounted for," he

replied. "I saw two young ladies riding through the village yesterday when I was at the Dispensary, and very naturally inquired who they were."

A thought flashed into my mind: a surmise which grew into certainty.

"You are old Doctor Barton's nephew," I exclaimed. "He told us you were coming to him."

"The same, at your service," he said, removing his hat. "I am Hobart Barton."

Doctor Barton was our family physician, and a very pleasant, genial old gentleman I considered him, though his memory was associated in my mind with sundry black draughts, hippo-powders, and burning liniments. I knew my father and mother relied on his friendship and had confidence in his judgment, but brief as was my acquaintance with the nephew, I felt more inclined to rely on the latter, for I trusted him implicitly.

"I must not ask how you came here," he said, "our friends would not wish it." There

was a slight emphasis on the word "friends," which showed he claimed forbearance for them as such. "Your family must be anxious."

I had no words to convey my sense of their uneasiness, so used the first that occurred to me, and said,

"Dreadfully!"

"Poor little lady," he rejoined, smilingly using the gipsy form of address, "you have suffered; but if I mistake not, it has wrought to a great end."

Before I could reply I saw a man advancing to meet us whom I instantly recognised as my father. His head was erect, as though he was gazing round him on every side, he trod with a firm, quick step, and carried a large stick. Though a man of peace and alone, I should not like to have met him just then as an enemy. He did not share the scruples of other Christians as to using violence in self-defence, and would have risked a great deal rather than let an offender go free. Feeling

this instinctively, I looked around for our guide, but he was not to be seen. He had vanished at the first sight of the on-comer.

I flew to meet my father; I clasped my arms around him and was tightly locked in his. I wept and laughed by turns, unable to offer any explanation, or even answer questions. Then recovering a little, I turned to see, and in my childish way present my new friend. He saved me the trouble of this by presenting himself, and was cordially received for his uncle's sake. I knew he would yet be for his own.

"But, Connie, where have you been? and how came you here?" inquired my father at length. "We have sought you anxiously."

Again Doctor Barton saved me from replying.

"She has been in the gipsy camp: I think she was carried off with no evil intent. There I met her when called to see a dying girl!"

"The gipsy camp!" exclaimed my father;

then restraining his curiosity, "Ah, death in such a place must be terrible!"

"In this case it is most blessed; the poor girl has been found of *our* Saviour, and is 'an heir of the kingdom which He hath promised to those who love Him.'"

He did not say through whom she had received the blessing, but in his words was a gentle reminder that we, too, were "debtors to mercy alone." Perhaps my father felt it, for he was silent.

I also was silent, for deep perplexity was working in my mind. Though carried away without compunction, I had been treated with forbearance afterwards, and felt my heart strangely drawn out to the sick girl. I did not want to bring trouble upon Madge who cared for the sufferer with such self-sacrifice and devotion, and who had sent me home under safe escort, thus correcting, as far as might be, the mischief she had done. Still I knew I must tell my father all: I could not withhold anything when he ouestioned me.

He did not do so while Doctor Barton was with us: it may be he divined something of this difficulty. I am sure Doctor Barton divined it at least, for he took occasion to whisper,

"Your father must be told all, little lady; at any cost."

And so I walked between the two, leaning on my father's arm at the close of that strangely eventful day. "A day with the poets," Helen had called it; a day of bitter realities it was to me, and yet a day of spiritual blessing.

The shades of evening had fallen, the eventful day was drawing to a close as we emerged from the leafy path on the open road once more. How long it seemed ere I traversed this road last! Hours had past; hours which lay behind me like ages of terror, dismay, loneliness, sorrow, until relief came, and a flood of joy put all thoughts of grief and pain to flight. I was not conscious of fatigue or hunger, though I had not partaken of food

since early in the day, and it was now past the time when our tea-tray would have been set. It was not until I came almost within sight of home, and the necessity for exertion was over, I woke up to this fact, and began to feel how much the long walk and fast were telling on my little strength.

"We must hasten home, my child," father said, as having parted from Doctor Barton he felt me hang heavily upon his arm. He put it round me now and half carried me along.

Never had my home seemed so beautiful as when absent from it on that eventful evening. I had gone in thought from one room to another; from one dear inmate to another. I even felt as if I could love Hope. Poor Hope! I generously forgave her indifference to my unloving self; but a new self was coming home now. Ah me, I did not know how strong was "the old Adam" who was coming home in me.

At this juncture I was terrified by the

appearance of a dusky group before us on the road, my nerves being completely unstrung. My head grew dizzy and my heart faint. There was a woman's cry, a shrill chorus of voices. I saw, as in a dream, my sister's form, and felt my mother's arms around me; then nature succumbed to what I had gone through, and for the first and last time in my life I fainted.

When I awoke I was lying in my mother's bed. I raised myself and surveyed it steadily to be sure of my actual position;—it was indeed my mother's room. By the light of a small but bright fire and a shaded lamp, everything had a comfortable and deliciously home-like appearance. My mother sat beside me, and when she had laid me back on the pillows after my general survey, fed me tenderly with some beef-tea that Helen brought, forbidding me to talk. After this I dozed for awhile, and waking up again partook of some tea and toast, before preparing for a really good night. But first I raised myself to a kneeling posture as I

thanked my Father in heaven (*my Father*, happy thought!), for having brought me in safety home. Yes, in more senses than one I had been brought home!

The next morning I was up betimes, having slept off my fatigue, and came to breakfast as usual. Until it was over no curiosity was manifested, but afterwards I had a long time alone with my father and mother. To them I related everything concerning my abduction, what Madge said to me, and the happy change in her sister, or friend; I did not know which to call her. I shrank with natural sensitiveness from speaking of the change in myself just then, but pleaded hard that nothing should be done to the lad or girl who took part in the kidnapping. My father said I must leave that to his own discretion, but he looked very grave: more grave I thought, than angry. My mother folded her arms about me as he went away, and whispered,

"We shall have cause to thank God even

for this trying adventure, darling: good will come out of it."

And then I found courage to reply,

"Good has come out of it to me, mamma; good for ever and ever."

Dear mother gave me a look of joyful intelligence.

"Has my child found her best Friend?"

"Ay, mamma, He has found me. The Lord has brought me home."

"Thank God!" was all she could utter.

Poor Helen judged herself very severely for having left me for a moment upon the road, but she believed I was close behind her until turning suddenly I was missed. She retraced her steps, searching everywhere in vain; and related again and again how deeply concerned Captain Murray was, how he had leaped over fences, shouted through the wood, and climbed high places to obtain a better view of the surrounding country. Why she could not tell, but from the first she associated my loss with the appearance of the gipsy, though Captain

Murray tried to reason away the fancy, and treated it as wholly absurd. Having been to the village to prosecute inquiries, he at last conducted my sister home, hoping against hope that I had by some means arrived there before them. On their way they met my father who listened to their story with a profound gravity, which was worse, Helen said, than any token of displeasure or alarm. He took his daughter into his own keeping, and having left her at home, immediately turned his steps in the direction of the encampment, rightly conjecturing that the gipsy had some reason, real or imaginary, for singly us out as objects of interest, or dislike.

I listened in cold silence to my sister's narration of the officer's gallant efforts for my rescue, and seeing with what indifference they were received, she drew me on to speak of the dying girl and her bold young advocate. Something held me silent when I came to the latter's denunciations of Captain Murray. They were to me at once meaningless and

awful, and I knew they would pain my sister inexpressibly. Another time I would tell her how Madge fancied she had some ground of complaint, and meant to wound my precious sister's heart by my removal. One thing was apparent to all, to Doctor Barton's timely appearance, and the diversion it caused in my favour, I owed my return.

There was one piece of news, however, I could not withhold, knowing how joyfully it would be received, so I lifted my eyes to Helen's while the colour rose to my face, for the confession cost me something to make, and said,

"Helen, there is one thing I have not told you. Can you guess it?"

She put her arms tenderly round me and answered,

"I know it, Connie. When you told how the dying girl rested in a Saviour's love, I knew my little sister had received it too."

Well, we were very happy, the sun never

shone more brightly, the sky was never clearer, or did blossom, or bee, or bird look or sing more sweetly. All nature was radiant with loveliness, and everything appeared invested with a glory it had never worn before. It was but a reflection of the joy within: indeed I could not help weeping for joy when I found myself alone. It was deeply spiritual, and yet there strangely mingled with it a natural element too, for I remember I kissed the dear stiff old sofas and chairs in the dining-room, as if they were tried friends to whom I had come home after an agony of separation. Truly, life was beautiful, home most precious, and earth a paradise because heaven was near. Perhaps for the latter reason earth should have been a wilderness. The two ideas may be linked together at a more advanced stage of the Christian course, but not, I think, at the outset. Earth is to the untried believer a place where he may witness for and walk with Christ with the great end,—the full fruition of His presence in view.

Even Hope failed to disturb or interrupt my pleasure, though she was repellant as ever. How she took my absence I could not tell, as I had not seen her at all the night of my return, but when I met her in the hall next morning I went up to salute her with a kiss of peace. As on the night of her arrival she turned her head aside, and she being taller than I, I touched her neck rather than her cheek.

"Hope," I said reproachfully, "are you not glad to see me?"

"Do you expect me to speak the truth?" she coldly asked.

"Certainly."

She turned her large black eyes upon me with a glassy stare and answered,

"No."

I was discouraged but not angry. My joy was too fresh and complete to admit of but one feeling as I whispered to myself,

"Poor girl, she cannot feel what I feel. I

pity her, and must forgive as I have been forgiven."

It would have been well had I always expressed myself to myself thus, but later in the day I had the bad taste, or want of judgment, to let my thoughts find utterance. When alone together I went up to her suddenly and exclaimed,

"O Hope! from my heart I pity you!"

She turned on me as if stung.

"Your love would be odious," she said, "but your pity is worse."

My first impulse would have been to strike her; the next moment grace conquered and reigned. When the Israelites came out of Egypt God led them by a round-about way, lest they "should see war and be discouraged." Afterwards they had to fight their way foot by foot into the land of rest. The evil of my own heart was not immediately drawn out, and the Holy Spirit of God whispered peace and taught forbearance to my perturbed spirit. Oh that it could have been always thus!

At prayers that evening my father, borrowing words from a sister Church, gave thanks to God for all who had "departed this life in His faith and fear." I thought of the sick girl I had seen in the gipsy camp, and so did he, for when we arose he said,

"The girl who was visited by young Doctor Barton is safe with her Saviour, Connie. She died without a fear."

I did not ask whether he had been to the encampment, but he answered my look of inquiry—

"I *have* been there, dear child. The whole gang go hence to-morrow."

I could no longer restrain my curiosity.

"And Madge, was she very sorry, papa? Was she her sister? Did she ask for me?"

"She was very sorry, little woman," he said gravely, ignoring the second question, "but saw that dying sometimes is easier than living. She inquired for you humbly and graciously."

"Humbly and graciously!" I could not

recognise Madge at all in these words, or the mood they implied; but that was all he told me and I never learned any more. I prayed for her, however, that night, and for many a night afterwards.

CHAPTER XI.

SEEING WAR.

FROM that time Captain Murray's visits to our house were discontinued. I never knew the reason, or what passed between him and my father, or my father and the rest of the family, for that something did pass I now feel assured. I am certain, from what I know of the Highland officer, he did not cease from the pursuit of any object he had in view until persuaded it was unattainable: neither could he lose without an effort to regain. I am equally certain, from the traits in my father's character, an offence would not have been lightly passed over. Once having his attention drawn to such, he would have thoroughly sifted the matter ere he came to a conclusion, but when that decision was arrived at it would have

been strictly adhered to, and regarded as the laws of the Medes and Persians,—final.

For a time our bonny rose drooped a little. Dropping the figure of speech, my sister's colour was not so clear as of yore, nor her smile as frequent. Still I thought there was something more beautiful in her face than I had ever seen there before, like an inward light shining out through it. I can read it now from memory as the peace of a chastened will, and recall her own words,—"I want to be wholly guided and restrained by a Power above and beyond myself." If Helen had trouble or disappointment, it at least wrought her no harm. Often I saw our mother's eyes come back from an anxious scrutiny of our dear one's face with this satisfying conclusion in them.

A trivial incident was very significant. When Helen had been for some time with our father alone in the breakfast-room, she came upstairs to her own where I was sitting, and went straight to a portfolio lying on the table.

Taking thence a withered spray which I recogised as the wild roses gathered by Captain Murray, once so blooming and fair, she opened the window and let them drop out. A fresh breeze was sighing past, and they were immediately caught by the wind and whirled away, or blown to powder, to be no more seen.

"There, Connie," she said a little sadly, " goes the record of a day's pain."

All her liking for Captain Murray, I am sure, went with the winds at that time also. I do not say there was no sense of loss or grievance left behind, but she flung from her courageously, with those faded flowers, the withered semblance of a once pure, fresh feeling.

"And what is the record of the day's pleasure, Helen?" I asked as by sudden inspiration.

She turned suddenly and kissed me.

"You," she said. "You yourself will be through all eternity a monument of mercy

as of joy. Connie, we have much connected with that day for which to thank God."

And she did thank Him, I know; unfeignedly thank Him: though not wholly without a feeling of natural regret. The Bible is full of strange paradoxes, and speaks of people being "in heaviness through manifold temptations," or trials, while at the same moment enabled through grace to "rejoice in the Lord."

Soon after this a draft of a new regiment came to our town and the gallant captain was removed. Strangely enough, I had little sympathy with him when he sought our friendship, but having reason to suspect he met a summary dismissal, I began to fear lest injustice had in some way been done him. I am glad to think now this was not so.

It is said all living souls desire to work for the Lord who has bought them at the inestimable cost of His own blood, and we are "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works."

Certain it is, I cast about in my mind to discern what profitable employment I could take up as service for the Master. I accompanied Helen in her district visiting; sat attentively in her Sabbath class and reverently in the church; but this was not enough. I wanted some work as my very own. This my stubborn, unloving, unlovely cousin supplied me with. If I could win her heart for myself, her soul for Christ, it would be accomplishing a great deal, and I should be a sort of spiritual giant.

It was a great deal "easier said than done." I thought I had only to show my cousin God's wondrous scheme of redemption and she would see it as I saw, not realising that He who opened the blind eyes must quicken the dead soul. I found out my mistake, that I could not awaken an anxious thought, still less, reveal a great salvation. I might as well try to make a marble figure that was standing in a corner of our hall, step down off its pedestal and walk, as bid a lifeless soul awake,

without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Christ alone can say, "Come forth!" to one who lies "tied and bound with the chains of his sins;" in the place of death, hampered with grave-clothes. Graciously He calls His servants into co-operation with Himself. He does not say to the living soul, "Shake off thy shroud: free thyself!" but to the waiting disciples of their new-found brother, "Loose him and let him go!"

I began my attempts to benefit by trying to show Hope that she was very wicked indeed, which she immediately resented.

"Speak for yourself," she answered tauntingly; "perhaps I am not quite so bad as you imagine."

"You are a great deal worse than you imagine," I rejoined boldly.

"Thank you," she said, growing cold as I waxed warm, "is that the charity you learn in your Bible?"

I was silenced: was I uncharitable? Certainly the Scripture says, "Judge not, that ye

be not judged." Hope had succeeded in turning aside the shaft that was to bring conviction, for the time at least.

I returned to the attack, however, and another day began,

"Hope, I have been thinking how little we need care for our bodies."

"Yours is dreadfully neglected," she replied.

I was well fed, well clad, surrounded by comfort, with every want supplied. Ah, it is easy under such circumstances to talk of indifference to mere bodily blessings. Even so have I seen those living at ease and in affluence preach to their poorer neighbours on the necessity of being "without carefulness."

"Do you not care for your soul, Hope?"

"Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't," she answered carelessly, "but I don't see what affair it is of yours."

"It concerns me greatly: I want to know if it is safe."

"Thank you; that is a matter between myself and God."

My next question was a direct home-thrust.

"Would you like to have all the good people,—any one you really love, you know, in heaven, and you yourself shut out?"

This cut her deeply to the heart at last. Her eyes fell, her colour faded until her cheeks were a sicklier hue than ever, while her fingers twined together and twitched convulsively. She made an effort to speak, and at length in husky tones uttered,

"Never ask me that question again: mind this. I can't believe the Bible: I don't believe people will be happy in heaven, and know those they were fond of on earth are shut out into torment. Would you be singing if you knew your mother was roasting to death?"

Again I was silenced: I could not meet such infidel arguments, but they drove me into God's immediate presence in prayer, and

thence to my mother. She replied by opening up and reading a very awful verse in the Revelation.

"'But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable,—and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.' Now look at what goes before and mingles with it," she said: "'God shall wipe away all tears from their (His people's) eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.' Connie, we must not be afraid to hear what God has said, and must believe because He has spoken. I may seldom understand but I must always believe. In heaven our wills and affections will be so wholly swallowed up in God's, there can be no possibility of murmuring against His decrees, or questioning His love. We shall be intensely happy because thoroughly satisfied, and fully persuaded He has done all things well. Not an uneasy

thought can arise: it may be we shall not miss any one, but certain it is, our Father's enemies will be ours, and we shall see they courted and merited ruin, and fell through their own wilful sin and unbelief. With one thing, however, I charge you, my child, as I charge my own heart,—ask no questions to which God has given no answer. Respect God's silence, and trust Him to act consistently with His character of justice, mercy, and truth."

In this lengthy reply I felt as if dear mother was answering her own misgivings as well as charging her heart with mine. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Ah, she had a loved one whom she would fain see within the pearly gates in the presence of the King.

That my mother followed up this conversation with Hope, I am aware, but I gave up all immediate efforts for my cousin's conversion, though trying from time to time to win her affection to myself.

"Hope," I remember saying one day, "does not this house seem beautiful to you?"

She opened her mouth to speak, then as if a sudden thought struck her, answered maliciously,

"It did once—when you were out of it."

It was too much; I was indignant and mortified, and for days afterwards if I did not hold my peace I held my tongue, and plainly showed my cousin that as far as I was concerned, she might do with her body and soul whatever she pleased.

War was declared between us, and we seldom encountered without hostilities. In my very self there was a strife between the old nature and the new, until sometimes I doubted whether I was a Christian at all, so wayward were my tempers, so grievous my inconsistencies, so hollow my profession. I sometimes wondered whether it was easier for the Israelites of old to take the cities that were "great and walled up to heaven," defended by

giants, than to win an entrance into that one young human heart which beat so strongly in opposition to my will. With what satisfaction I came upon a verse in the Proverbs, —"A brother offended is harder to be won than a great city." Ah, I thought, "a woman offended is the most obdurate creature under the sun."

In fact, Hope liked no one but Helen. To her aunt she did not dare to be offensive, but was simply and passively ungrateful. To my father she rarely spoke, and only in reply to some question or ordinary courtesy. To me she was worse than repellant; I had the misfortune to call forth her ill-temper, and was the object of her continual aversion. To Helen alone she ever unbent, or rather appeared to thaw a little under my sister's influence.

I asked Helen one day whether she thought Hope could love anybody?

"Yes," she replied with a bright smile, "I am beginning to suspect she loves me."

"Well, she hates me, at all events."

"Do you love her?"

"No," I said, "I couldn't."

"Did you ever for one moment feel as she does?"

"No, I couldn't."

"That is the secret of her indifference—or worse."

"Why, Helen, you would not have me always thinking how I should feel if you were"—I was going to say "dead," but could not bring it out, so substituted "away, and mother away?"

"I would not always have you thinking thus, darling," she replied, "but I would have you sometimes ask yourself how you should feel if bereft of all, as our cousin is? This would make you very tender towards her, and the shadow of a great trouble would prove her protection. Forbear and forgive for the sake of that, if not for her wayward self."

Ah, it was easy to talk thus and re-

solve, for Helen whom she did not dislike, for me who had never known a trouble but the few hours' alarm when carried to the gipsy camp; so easy to talk, but hard to endure.

CHAPTER XII.

LYING LOW.

THERE was no one in all the country round I liked so well to see in our house as a visitor as young Doctor Barton. He came pretty often, that is, as often as his professional duties would admit, for he was taking up his uncle's practice, the old gentleman contemplating securing well-earned repose by retiring in favour of his nephew. Perhaps it was to secure well-earned repose for himself that Doctor Hobart, as we learned to call him, made one of our family party in the long pleasant winter evenings that ensued. Such happy evenings they were, with music, readings, and conversation in which I learned a great deal. Even my annoyance and disappointment about my cousin was forgotten in them, and I often felt

my troubles, as it were, laid to rest with the falling shades of night. A veil was then thrown over them from which they did not emerge till morning's light. Ah me; the summer nights are long and lovely, but I always love the winter best for the sake of those early days.

"Well, well," said old Doctor Barton to my father as he sat at our dinner-table, from which his nephew (I need scarcely say) was absent, "Hobart would be a very fine fellow if he only minded his profession."

"I thought he was skilful," returned my father.

"And so he is, sir, and so he is. He might be at the top of the ladder when he gains experience."

"How is it then that he does not mind it? I know he is diligent."

"He takes up another too, sir, and throws himself into that, heart and soul. He wants to be doctor and minister both."

"Don't you think both may unite in one

profession, doctor," inquired my father, smiling, "even in that of a Christian?"

"Well, well," replied the old man, "I was contented with doing my duty and letting the parson do his. I always told the family of my patients to send for him in bad cases; but I don't see the use of frightening a man out of his wits, and out of the world before his time, by telling him plump and plain his days in it are few."

"If you had a difficult operation to perform would you shrink from probing deep to save life?" my father pursued, "or would you lose time?"

"Deep or not deep, I should not question that matter if I thought an operation would be successful in arresting the disease."

"Is not the soul more precious than the body?"

The poor old doctor fidgeted uneasily on his chair, then he took up his nephew as a safe topic.

"Hobart is a good fellow—a very good

fellow, but I am afraid he never will be well off."

"I have heard much of his disinterested kindness," put in my mother.

"Rich in good works," suggested Helen.

"Ah," returned the old doctor, rising from his seat and beating an undignified retreat, "if a woman comes to the front you may withdraw from the battle. You are all like-minded."

Like-minded! Ay, in truth; in very truth, thank God.

"Yield yourself, doctor," said my sister lightly.

"To whom? to you?"

"No," she rejoined more gravely, seizing the opportunity, "to One above."

"My uncle thinks I overstep my limits, and go beyond my duty," Doctor Hobart remarked to us afterwards.

"Rather, he narrows your limits," remarked Helen.

"I think that must be the grand thing in being a doctor," I exclaimed.

"What?"

"To bring comfort to sick or dying people."

"Living people want it too, my little lady."

"More," said Hope, who had been sitting apart, in an undertone.

Low as was the word he heard it, but did not look towards her as he replied,

"To some, living is harder than dying, because life is a continuous struggle, death a short one. I have often thought, in the varied scenes of trial we witness, what need we have to breathe the prayer—'Teach me to live.' Only having a Friend Who will walk with us through the lonely paths of life, and help us over its thorny and troublesome places, can sustain; only Jesus, as you have seen, Miss Constance, can make 'the valley of the shadow of death' bright with His presence. Oh, how blessed to have such companionship: to trust His love, to rest on His sympathy!"

I knew who this was intended for, and neither Helen nor I marred the effect of it by a word. It is easy to say too much as too little. Doctor Hobart reminded us of this as he whispered,

"Physicians know the evil effects of overdoses. We must talk less and live better."

As he was leaving the house I followed him.

"Doctor Hobart, I could never do any good," I said.

"Why not?"

I was going to say I was so bad myself, but that sounded like affected humility, so mended my sentence.

"I don't know how to set about it."

"Dear child," he replied, "keep near the Master, and He will use you in His own good time and way. Lie low at His feet, and He will lift you up."

"I would rather remain there," I whispered.

"Keep there in spirit ever," he rejoined,

"there is no strength, or wisdom, or blessing apart from Him: nothing apart from Him," he added reverently, looking up as though he saw the unseen Friend. "Martha was occupied with her service, Mary taken up with the Master, yet when the fitting time came she was ready with service as you know, and it was a very fragrant one."

I thought afterwards how much better she understood the mind of the Lord than others came out in the words—"Against the day of my burying *hath she kept this.*" She knew what poor Peter could not allow, that He was to die.

Doctor Hobart's next question recalled me to myself.

"Is there any little thing you have tried to do for Him?"

"I tried, but could not get on," I whispered again.

"Try prayer."

"Yes," he continued after a pause, "try prayer. Do not renew the efforts or attack or

whatever it may be, until you commune with the Master about it. When the disciples failed in service, and the evil spirit proved too strong, they went to Jesus with their difficulty, 'Why could not we cast him out?' When evil befell a true-hearted follower 'they went and told Jesus.'"

"Why could not we cast him out?" The words lived in my memory long afterwards. And the answer came, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." What was fasting? I asked myself—self-denial.

"Miss Constance," said Doctor Hobart, "are you too little a lady for a story?"

"I hope not," I answered, smiling.

"Well, I will tell you one that has been a great help to me. During Wellington's wars he had to attack a stronghold which was so well defended that all his generals rather held back from an attempt to take it. At last, calling one into his council, he asked if he would go against the enemy at this point. 'I will,' replied the gallant officer, 'but first give

me a grip of the all-conquering right hand.' The Iron Duke grasped his brave soldier by the hand and pressed it warmly, and thus encouraged the general went on and won. Dear child, try and think that you take your hand from the Saviour's once pierced for you, when you hold it out to one, big or little, whom you wish to aid. Can it be stretched forth otherwise than in love? must it not prevail?"

"You have had a long chat with the doctor, darling," said my mother as I met her on returning through the hall.

"Yes, mamma, and it has done me good."

"I can quite believe that; but don't get too much into the little head."

"There is a great deal in the little heart," I said, for it was swelling with a sense of God's love and tenderness towards His children, "a great many big people."

"Is Doctor Hobart there?"

"Indeed he is, mamma. Do you know there is one great difference between Doctor Hobart

and" (I was going to mention other names but stopped myself) "other good people I know. If I was to tell what passes in my mind to Mr. Nisbet (our minister), he would attend to me of course, but there would be a look in his eyes as if he was attending to something else too, all the time. Doctor Hobart looks as if he gave his whole mind to what you were saying."

"A great recommendation for a doctor," returned my mother, laughing, "the secret of success in much, yet rarely sincere."

"Mamma!" I exclaimed, "Doctor Hobart is sincere."

"I never doubted it for a moment, my child. Well, has he helped you on?"

"Yes, by telling me to lie low."

"Somebody has said, 'The Christian course is a series of fresh starts,'" she replied. "I don't know what the young would do if it was not so, for they are impatient of failure as though 'some strange thing happened to them,' and ready to be up and doing when

the first crush of disappointment is past. 'Strong is the patience that overcometh,' a poet says. My child, seek this patience, for you need it, in lying low."

And I hope I did—I think I did; and it helped me not only to make a fresh start, but gave me strength for trial to come.

One thing strongly possessed my mind,—I ought to advance very quickly on the heavenly road with such a father, mother, sister and friend to counsel or encourage. I did not appear to do so, however, and it seemed to me rather like creeping than striding. I am afraid I had something of the spirit of the wicked Haman, who could not be contented while one he cared not for sat daily in his way, and ever crossed his path.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE MIST.

I WOULD touch lightly, lovingly, reverently, what follows, neither magnifying evil nor ignoring the blessing which resulted therefrom. Not all at once can we look at things as they are, or rather, as they may be: only in review they come back to us with a different aspect, and we can truly say, "He hath done all things well!"

Hope never fulfilled my early anticipations and schemes for her benefit by becoming an equestrian, neither would she practise upon my favourite donkey. I was glad of this, for donkeys generally have enough bad tricks by nature, and though I did not share in the prejudice against them of an elderly lady who figures in print, I was unwilling mine should

have its evil propensities developed by injudicious treatment. Helen often attempted to get our cousin to mount, knowing how exhilarating is exercise on horseback, and probably hoping it would blow away her morbid sensitiveness and ill-humours. I suppose poor Hope said to herself she was misunderstood. How many young people say that who are at no pains to understand others, and thus never are blessed by an interchange of thought or feeling. We talk against conventual life, but are afraid "our hermit spirits, each in its narrow cell of joy or woe," dwell too much alone and apart; and our world is hedged in to a very small circumference.

At length one beautiful day even in mid-winter, Hope was induced to take her first lesson in riding from my sister. There had been a frost the night before, the ground was crisp and even, but the sun shone brightly during the day and everything looked glad and gay. I watched her mount Lassie awkwardly, with a feeling of intense dissatis-

faction, while my sister placing her foot in our father's hand sprang gracefully into the saddle. Of course I was unreasonable in expecting expertness and ease from our young cousin, to whom the whole proceeding was novel, and I foolishly persuaded myself she would spoil my pony's paces, hurt her mouth, or otherwise unfit her for my acquaintance in the future.

With one thing, at all events, I was satisfied,—Hope positively refused to wear my habit, so that a sort of nondescript dress had been got up for her in a hurry, which of course increased the awkwardness of appearance.

I went back to the dining-room. My mother sat alone in a deep bay window with the japonica showing its bright clusters to those inside. On the other hand was a delicate winter rose drooping its fair head. She looked very peaceful as she sat there with her work in her lap, but I suddenly remembered what was hidden beneath that calm

exterior. Again it was the joy of trouble past, not of one who had passed scathless through earth's cleansing fires. My father had walked away over the home farm.

I took a book and placed myself on a low seat at her feet. I felt very wicked and painfully conscious that she discerned what was passing in my mind, and understood even better than I did what was printed on the page before me. I might control, but had no power of concealing emotion. It was some time before I recovered from the disturbing influence of a sight of the equestrians, but she gave me space to settle down. Then by one or two remarks she quietly led my thoughts away from my cousin altogether, and these diverted, I began to enjoy the soothing sense of having my dear mother all to myself.

All at once my strange dream flashed into my mind. I had never mentioned, and in truth, almost forgotten it, but in some strange way it seemed even now as if the mist was

"I took a book and placed myself on a low seat at her feet."—*Page* 154.

encircling and severing her from me. Under this influence I spoke impulsively, and laying my head against her knee, said in a smothered voice,

"Mother, I want to share your trouble."

I did not look up, but felt her start. After a while she spoke.

"Why is this, my child?"

I raised my head and answered warmly,

"I know you are bearing some grief, and have a care upon your mind that no one quite enters into or shares."

"No one, Connie?"

"I do not mean the Lord does not feel for you, mamma," I went on. "I am sure He loves you very much, and that you tell Him everything. I am sure too, if you keep on praying about it, it will be easier to bear and must all come right. Still it might be a comfort to you to think some one on earth cared too. Could you not ease your mind by talking to some one about this trouble?"

"Might not talking of it revive it, Connie?"

"Is it buried, mamma?"

She looked quickly at me.

"What a vivid fancy you have, my child," she said. "No, it is not buried; it never can be that: but it is daily laid before my Father in heaven."

"And you take it up again?"

"Sometimes I do," she answered sadly, "sometimes only I leave it there, for I am faithless and unbelieving."

"Oh no, not that," I exclaimed, throwing my arms about her. "Mamma, I know I should not have spoken, but only did so because it would ease my heart to go through the mist to you."

Dear mother looked surprised and said she did not understand me. I related my dream.

"I did not think you would dwell so much upon anything you have learned, my darling," she rejoined, "or that a few words of mine would have disturbed your rest that night. You have a strange perception as well as

some force of character. It is strong in its likes and dislikes. *I* know, too, you have a warm heart."

I understood the emphasis; Hope did not know it. She paused for a few moments and then went on.

"You are young to have that heart burdened by care, yet it may be good for you. A proper amount of ballast steadies a light ship. It may be you require it, but, Connie, sorrow has one of two effects upon our poor weak spirits:—it either softens or hardens. It makes one considerate for others,—gentle and forbearing in their woe; or it takes a selfish form, and the tried one comes to live in it and magnify it until there is no room in his heart for another's woe, no tender, God-given compassion for a fellow-sufferer."

I knew which effect it had produced in my mother's life, but I was young and untried. It was no wonder she doubted me, I thought, for I even doubted myself. I remembered

how sorrow had acted upon another heart as young, and perhaps, once as tender as my own, until it set it in a sort of living desert, with an Ishmael spirit; the enemy of all.

It was not my nature to remain long in uncertainty, so raising my head and looking straight into my mother's eyes I asked,

"What effect would sharing your trouble have upon me?"

She gazed irresolutely at me for a while, then said,

"It ought to soften and at the same time strengthen. I thank you for your love and care, my child, and cannot say it nay. Not this evening, though, can I open up what is in my heart to you: do not ask me to talk to you more about it now."

I did not suspect until afterwards that, in expectation of my father's return at any moment, she desired to regain her usual calm, undemonstrative manner. One aim of her life was to conceal from him, more than all,

that she suffered: she would not even by a look convey a tacit reproach.

Only as she folded me in her embrace I felt a tear upon my cheek. She kissed it off and releasing me took from her Bible a leaflet.

"Think over the verses I have marked, Connie," she said, "pray over them, learn them by heart, and they will save you from much perplexity and trouble. 'Affliction springeth not out of the ground;' we must not be looking at second causes. God either directly brings, or permits a cloud to overshadow us; so that we walk in mystery and darkness for a time; but patience, if we trust Him, He will bring brightness and blessing out of it. He is better than our fears: our Master is ever with us."

I took the leaflet, and with her own dear, neat pencil-mark not quite erased, it lies beside me on the table as I write. With grateful affection I trace the lines which often afterwards proved a stay and comfort in the dark season of trouble.

"Without murmur, uncomplaining,
In His hand
Leave whatever things thou canst not
Understand.
Though the world thy folly spurneth,
From thy path in pity turneth,
Peace thy inmost soul shall fill,
Lying still.

Therefore whatsoe'er betideth,
Night or day,
Know His love for thee provideth
Good alway.
Crown of sorrows gladly take,
Gladly wear it for His sake;
Sweetly bending to His will,
Lying still.

To His own the Saviour giveth
Daily strength;
To each troubled soul that liveth
Peace at length.
Weakest lambs have largest share
Of the tender Shepherd's care;
Ask Him not then, when? or how?
Only bow."

I read the lines again and again, and prayed over them as my mother had said. I tried to enter into their spirit and meaning,—I with my hopeful, happy spirit, over which had as yet fallen only the shadow of another's care.

For I knew then by some mysterious instinct, which I do not understand and therefore cannot explain, that trouble was near, and something more than sharing my mother's regrets for her absent dear one was looming over me.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONLY BOW.

WITH the lines I have quoted still in my hand, I heard the distant galloping of a horse up the long and what we called lower avenue, leading to our house. I heard as in a dream, with a dull sense of unreality which rapidly deepened into nervous dread as the wild footsteps came nearer and nearer. Why this mad haste? My room was at the side of the house, and my window overlooked the gravelled sweep to the back entrance to which the horseman turned, having passed the gate of the upper avenue.

I stood up gasping in great fear. I sprang to the window grasping its framework for support. Our servant galloped past beneath me—alone! I saw him bending to the saddle-

bow, I saw the foam upon the horse's mouth, and a speck of blood upon his side where the spur had entered. I took it all in at a glance.

Oh, the agony of that moment! I cannot bear to recall it even now. I turned from the window, two verses of the hymn I had just read ringing in my remembrance, two words, as it seemed, sounding in my ears, two words upon my lips,—"Only bow!"

"O God," I murmured, "give us strength to bear; give me strength to hear!"

For there came upon me then a sense of all that was required of me in this terrible dilemma. I must strive to regain composure, to listen alone, to suffer and be still, to spare my mother as much as possible.

I stole swiftly downstairs: very, very softly past my mother's door, which was closed. Her room was not in the same part of the house as mine, so she might not have heard the alarming sounds.

Once downstairs I flew on and out to the

courtyard. The groom was there with a white, scared face, standing beside his panting horse inquiring vainly of the frightened servants for his master.

"Hoskins," I exclaimed, "what is the matter? Do not be afraid to tell me."

"An accident, Miss Constance," he returned hesitatingly, "it may not be bad. Do not give way."

My lips quivered so that I could with difficulty frame the next question.

"Is it Miss Helen?"

And the answer fell as a hammer-stroke upon my heart,

"Miss Helen."

I reeled beneath the blow: it was more than I could bear. The yard appeared to swim round and the man to fade from my view, but I rallied my failing powers, and with a feeble cry for aid came back to sight and sense once more. Yes, came back to myself and the reality of the dreadful tidings I had heard. I was in the cook's

strong arms now, leaning my head upon her shoulder.

"Poor dear!" I heard sigh, but her voice sounded a long way off.

I lifted myself up with her assistance, her arm still round me. I saw my mother appear in a doorway leading from the house to the yard, and come on till she stood beside me. Her voice was terrible in its calmness, her face rigid as she said,

"Hoskins, tell me all; as shortly as you can."

The man obeyed at once.

"We was riding along the road through the Glen, Miss Helen and the young miss a good bit ahead, when they came to the stream that crosses the road. The young miss was timorsome and did not like to go on because the water, which was no more than a foot high, was frozen. I saw Miss Helen persuading and encouraging her, but it was never no use, she refused to cross it on horseback, so my young lady called to me to hold the pony while Miss

Hope got down and went over the stepping-stones. I dismounted and did so. Some part of Miss Hope's dress got twisted round the stirrup, and instead of waiting till I could take it off she gave it a great pull and dragged it off altogether. You know, ma'am, 'twas not a regular riding-habit. It dipped into her way as she took the first step, and nearly tripped her up, and she tossed it back careless over her shoulder. It must have struck the bay mare right 'atween the eyes, for Miss Helen was close behind. The mare reared, then swerved aside. My young lady kept her seat beautiful and patted Bessie on the neck and spoke to her, while I sprang to catch the bridle, but before I had power to do so the poor animal put her foot upon one of them slippery stones and came down with Miss Helen upon her."

There was an awful pause: all felt too much time had been lost in telling the story, yet dreaded to ask the next question which was uppermost in each mind. My mother's hoarse voice put it,

"Is she living?"

"I believe so, my lady; I hope so. A labourer in a field near by saw us; he helped me to get out my dear young lady and we carried her to his house. His wife and Miss Hope are with her there. I stopped at Doctor Barton's as I passed and sent him on."

"You have done well, Hoskins. Put two horses under the carriage at once. James," to the stable-boy, "find your master; the men will tell you where he is. If here in time he will come on with me: if not, tell him to mount that horse and follow to the Glen Ford. Let one or two of the men also come. Lose not a moment."

I pleaded to be taken with her: I pleaded as for my own life. My life! oh how valueless it seemed in comparison with hers! In view of what *might* happen I could not do otherwise. I was more than a child then; the bright, unthinking days of childhood were far away in the happy past, a crushing weight

of trial had fallen upon me, and I could not sit down and weep over it as a child might have done. I won my point: perhaps my mother too thought of what might occur.

It was the work of a minute to put on a warm coat and hood. Of course I was ready before the carriage, and as I crossed the doorway in my impatience walked straight against a man who was hurriedly entering. It was Doctor Hobart.

"Connie," he said in tones which were shaken out of their usual fulness and gravity, "for God's sake, tell me what has happened."

I looked up into his face only to see there a reflection of my own terrible alarm.

"Helen is hurt," I exclaimed. "O Doctor Hobart! she may be"——

I could not finish the sentence. He whispered huskily,

"Where?"

"At the Glen Ford."

"Can I have a horse?" was all he said.

I could not tell him. He turned from me with the few words, "May God strengthen us!"

Us! He felt not only for, but with us. It comforted me a little even then, but what was his woe to ours?

I afterwards found he had learned from his uncle's old housekeeper that an accident had occurred and her master was called out. Particulars she could not give, so Doctor Hobart had come straight to our house.

I cannot speak of the drive that followed: perhaps it was a short one, but every moment seemed an age. The horses to me moved slowly, though I was conscious they were fresh, and goaded on by whip and voice. I am not unmerciful, but every time I heard the whiz of the whip through the still air and the descending cut I wished it had been heavier.

My father had not returned in time to accompany us, but passed us on the road urging on his tired horse. The fleck of blood was still

upon the poor animal's side, or was it another? Before him in the far distance as the road took a turn, I could see through the carriage window another horseman speeding along with literally flying footsteps. Sunlight had faded, day was declining, and against the cold grey sky strongly defined, there was something awful to me in the calm energy of that unbending figure. God had indeed strengthened *him*.

We spoke but once.

"Mother," I whispered, "it is hard to say now, 'Only bow.'"

"Thank you for reminding me," she murmured, "it will help me to bear. My Father has done it!"

After a pause she added, "God has a school of sorrow, and I think the highest lessons are learnt in that. Connie, you are entering it now."

As we descended from the carriage when it stopped she laid a detaining hand upon my arm.

"My darling," she said, "you are but a

child, yet a comfort to me, and I depend upon you. Remember if—if your sister is still here, any show of feeling may injure her. You must be perfectly quiet to be of use."

I promised, and quietly stole into the cottage she entered. Then I saw her,—my own precious sister, never so precious in all my young life before,—lying as in death.

CHAPTER XV.

IN GOD'S SCHOOL.

It was a poor wayside cottage. She lay near the entrance on a door that had been taken from its hinges and was propped up in some rude way. My father stood on one side, and Doctor Hobart kneeling on the ground held one hand in his, while the fingers of his other hand were on her wrist. Doctor Barton was seeking to administer something. A woman stood apart with hushed breath and scared face. Another figure crouched in a corner: I scarcely noticed it.

Her hair had been partly cut off, and across one temple was a broad seam where I afterwards found a wound had been drawn together. There was blood on her white face,—that bonny face I loved so well:

blood on her wet habit. She was still unconscious.

Only she yet lived. Doctor Hobart lifted his rigid face towards me as I passed and whispered this, or I don't think I could have lived. She was yet with us; yet within the reach of prayer: yet where hope might be rekindled on her behalf. And I did hope, for my whole soul went forth in fervent pleadings with God. I was perfectly quiet, but it was not the stillness of despair. It was rather the agony of that voiceless supplication which is too deep for words, too overwhelming for endeavour.

Oh! how I wished the Saviour yet trod the earth, that I might rush to Him for healing for our beloved one. But was He not living still? would He not hear? Ah yes, my faith looked up to Him, and I clung as it were to His wounded hand, saying, "I cannot let Thee go. Lord, behold *she* whom Thou lovest is sick." I realised then that He was a Fellow-sufferer: that "He endured grief, suffering

wrongfully," and by "the transgression of His people" (as well as for) "was smitten." I realised too, to my comfort, that He must love her He had died to save, no matter how mysterious His providences might prove.

"Will she recover from this state?" my father asked at length.

Doctor Barton looked very grave.

"I dare not deceive you," he said; "life hangs by a feeble thread. I cannot speak definitely as to internal injuries at present, as we have been unable to make a proper examination, but evidently the brain has suffered. Her collar-bone was broken: it has been reset. This unconsciousness may be from the shock to the nervous system, but we fear it is far more. Still 'while there's life there's hope.'"

What miserable comfort these words give, and yet how hard to crush hope out of the human heart. Oh! could love and hope bring back from the verge of the grave?

"She will live," said Doctor Hobart suddenly, again lifting his pale, rigid face.

"Perhaps better not," was his uncle's sad reply.

The words were spoken very low; they escaped him as it were; but Doctor Hobart bent his head as if he had been struck. I heard him murmur "As Thou wilt!" that was all. Upon my heart, too, they fell like a bar of ice.

"Can she be removed?" my father again inquired.

"I scarcely know how to answer," Doctor Barton returned. "If there is to be a removal it had better be immediate and while she is unconscious. It would be difficult to effect it afterwards if she recovers consciousness." (Oh how terrible the doubt implied!) "Still I do not see how she can be conveyed home."

"Our carriage"——

"Would not do," he rejoined briefly.

"One or two men were to follow us," put in my mother. "Can they be of use?"

"They must carry her so then on this," was his reply, touching the door on which she had been placed. "Mr. Munro, see if they are here."

After my father left the cottage the figure in the corner raised itself and stood up. Then it stole forward and I recognised my cousin. Her eyes, which were swollen with weeping, gleamed with a wild, vain yearning; her hair hung in disorder round her anxious face. She came to my sister's side, and standing there with clasped hands gazed down upon the lovely wreck with an agony of apprehension mingled with tender, reverent affection. From my heart I pitied her; pitied her more than the innocent victim of her carelessness or passion.

"Do you know it was through my fault this has happened?" she whispered in a hoarse voice.

"Hush," my mother answered in the same low tone, and stretching out her hand, "we do. Do not speak of that now."

Hope did not take the offered hand, but wringing her own together bent another reverent gaze on what might have been the face of death. Then moaning out—"If only I had suffered! Oh if I could lie there instead of her!" rushed with light steps from the house.

"Follow her," said my mother; "you and she go home in the carriage at once and prepare everything for our coming. I will walk with your father."

"Trust her to us," Doctor Hobart put in very gently. "Dear Mrs. Munro, you can do no good by this. Take poor Connie home."

Ever thoughtful for others, he wished to spare my mother the pain of witnessing the removal by directing her attention to me. I knew this, and did not protest, but silently followed my cousin.

I found her beneath a hedge in the corner of a field near the cottage, sobbing as if her heart would break. She looked up at my approach.

"Go away," she exclaimed wildly, "go away. It was all my doing: I have killed your sister. I am a murderer in God's sight, the worst and wickedest of murderers, for I caused—oh I caused the life to be crushed out of one of God's best and sweetest creatures. It is no wonder you hate me now. Yet I loved her, Connie; God knows if there was a being on earth I cared for it was Helen. So fair, so good, so true to me in spite of all my hardness and ungrateful ways. Ah, she was true to herself, for it wasn't in her to do wrong. Oh! if I could only die instead of her; but I am not fit to die. I should be lost—lost for ever: this last sin would sink me down."

I sat down beside her and mingled my tears with hers.

"O Hope!" I sobbed, "I forgive you. Mother calls sorrow 'God's school.' Hope, do not turn away from me, for my heart is very sore. We are in one school now: bound together by one trouble."

"Connie," she said, "you are not like me: you love God and call Him your Father. Wouldn't He hear you if you asked Him very much not to let Helen die?"

"He would hear me," I replied hesitatingly; "but mother often says we should only ask for what He wishes to give us. He is so much wiser than we are, and can always tell exactly what is best for us."

"But this must be best, for think of all the good she could do on earth, and how beautiful she makes it for some; and I never could forgive myself if she died. O Connie! do you think God will forgive me? I feel He is so angry."

"I am sure He will," I rejoined. "Jesus came to save the lost, and your wrong to my sister is nothing compared to your sins against Him. Hope, let us kneel down here and ask Him to pardon you, and if it is His will, make our darling well."

I do not know in what words I besought the Lord for my sister and for her who knelt

beside me there on the crisp grass: petitions for pardon, peace, life and strength, were strangely blended together. For a sin-stricken soul, for a suffering body, for a term on earth, for an eternal inheritance in heaven, my feeble cries ascended. We arose calmed and strengthened. And the pale stars began to come out one by one, and under the solemn sky the bitter animosity which had so long held us apart was done away for ever. We clasped each other's hands and ventured back.

The carriage was waiting for us, and they were forming a rude litter to bear my sister home. She yet lived! I took her cold hand for the first time: I knelt beside her and pressed a long kiss upon her cheek. Oh, was it to be the last time I should press it in life?

"Oh! if the Lord was only here," I moaned.

"He is here," Doctor Hobart said very gently. "Connie, this is terrible to bear, but it is worse still to doubt *Him*."

I could see even in the gloom the grateful look my mother turned upon him, and like a weak and wounded thing I clung desperately to my last hope—the hand of my Lord. He was present, He could relieve; He loved us still.

My father urged dear mother to accompany us in the carriage, and she yielded. He averted his eyes as Hope passed him.

"Drive quickly," he said to the man on the box, "and send the spring-cart with two or three other men to meet us. Tell them to hasten as for life."

Then we were off, and looking back under the solemn sky I saw them preparing to carry my sister home. I remembered how joyously and gracefully she had sprung into the saddle that morning; how little help she needed then. Now she lay crushed and wounded by the fault of the young hand I had clasped so fondly. Yet there was no trace of bitterness in my heart. In the remembrance of that still form, in the remembrance of what my precious sister

had been, under the solemn sky where through each pale star the eyes of God seemed watching us, I could but bow in awed silence and be still.

CHAPTER XVI.

DARK DAYS.

MANY and many a time through the dark days that followed I said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past," for many a time we thought the worst was over and our loved one actually passing the borders of the better land. We watched, as it were, her young life ebb away, and then would come a pause and a rally as her fresh, strong constitution enabled her to struggle back to life. I was not of an age to understand her injuries and consequent sufferings, but knew they were of a very serious and complicated nature. Two doctors had been summoned from the nearest large town, and there were daily visits and consultations which ever left us in the same suspense and uncertainty.

Many seasons of suffering, too, there were, when even our mother could scarcely bear to stay in the room, but at such times Doctor Hobart never left it. We could rely upon him to watch the effects of all surgical operations with the utmost tenderness and skill. Under his supervision no further accident could occur: nothing was left undone that could relieve. With a quiet authority which the sufferer owned, his influence was felt in every way. Old Doctor Barton, anxious and attentive, for my sister had been dear as a child to his lonely heart, and in many ways shed a brightness over his bachelor life, was not equal to the strain which his nephew bore apparently without feeling it. Night after night Doctor Hobart remained with us as a watcher, ever pointing in our extremity to that "Friend who sticketh closer than a brother." Often and often I thanked God for this timely aid and support.

There were times, too, when we thought it would be almost better our darling should go

to God then than linger on a helpless, disabled woman, to be a sufferer all her days. It was nearly as hard to think of a long life thus clouded, the young, joyous spirit subdued, as it was to contemplate an immediate parting. In view of the latter I was able to look above and beyond and see the perfect freedom from sin and suffering, the gladness of completed redemption, the rest of the Lord's presence which is to be the portion of His people for ever, and give thanks for the hope afforded.

One day I ventured to express some of these thoughts about the trial of living to Doctor Hobart, as I remembered what he had said about the dying girl in the gipsy camp, and felt he would understand them. I was not prepared for his reply.

"Child," he said, for him almost sternly, "do not speak so. If God graciously restores your sister, life cannot be a burden with—those who love her to brighten and make it beautiful."

There was a strange light in his eyes, and I thought how rich and happy, how safe and blest, the life might be which he set himself to guard and cherish.

One thing I earnestly desired, and that was, for Helen to know that through this terrible loss and trial to her our cousin had been led to Christ. Yes, to the foot of the cross, not mourning alone over one thoughtless act and the mischief it entailed, but recognising her entire wickedness, and crying out in deep humility of spirit, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned!" There the message of mercy reached her, "Thy sins are forgiven."

And she left His feet who had spoken peace to her troubled soul, not to wrap herself up again in the chilling influence of a selfish sorrow, and morbidly nurse it until it not only marred her usefulness but narrowed up her sympathies. Rather, she sought to witness for Christ by patient affection, "through constant watching wise," and by "the ornament

of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price."

But though this one bright gleam amid the surrounding darkness was a constant source of thankfulness, another care was added to my anxiety about my beloved sister. This was, that my father evidently could not all at once forgive Hope for her part in bringing trouble upon us. It seemed hard to visit it upon the poor child whose contrition was so deep, and self-judgment severe, but considering how generously my father had opened his house and heart to the orphan, I could not but acknowledge he had sad cause of complaint, which might naturally deepen into dislike.

At first my mother, who of course divined his feelings, if he did not express them, managed to keep Hope out of his sight as much as possible. My cousin and I had a table apart from the rest of the family in a small room by ourselves. I did not object to this

arrangement, as I cared but little where I ate or drank, but I was decidedly uncomfortable when I discovered the cause. It was first suggested to me by Hope.

"Connie," she said, "I know your father's heart is hard towards me, and he cannot bear me in his sight. I do not wonder at it: I cannot blame him. I am sure even to see me must grieve him dreadfully, and I would spare him that pain. Oh, if I could go away somewhere!"

"Surely you would not leave us, Hope?"

"No," she answered sadly, "this beautiful house is home to me now. Often your delight in it set me mad: now I am almost as proud of it as you are."

"But it is not the house"—I put in with somewhat of my old jealous sensitiveness.

"No, dear," she said, "but the people, and one little person more than any."

Truly my cousin was changed and I satisfied.

The anxious impression Hope had awakened was partly confirmed by accidentally overhearing a conversation between my father and mother. I had entered the dining-room to look for a book, treading noiselessly and speaking low, ever remembering who lay in the darkened room upstairs to which no sound must reach. My mother hung upon father's shoulder and their backs were towards me, while there was nothing in their opening conversation to warn me to retreat.

"John," I heard her murmur, "did not God love His Son, and yet He not only forgave men for His crucifixion, but took them to His pity and in rich grace forgave?"

There was no answer.

"Would the disciples have done well had they refused to receive the converted persecutor and blasphemer because he kept the raiment of those who slew Stephen?"

No answer.

"John, do not let your heart be closed against this poor orphan child for a mere act of carelessness, or thoughtlessness, no matter how terrible in its results. O John! does your heart never upbraid you afterwards for a harsh judgment?"

Again there was a pause ere my father answered. When he did so I could scarcely recognise his voice, it had so little of his usual calmness and firmness in its tone.

"Barbara," he murmured, "you are right, though I could scarcely bear to acknowledge it before. God knows my pride has been brought low, and I often deplore the past."

"You forgive *him?*" she asked with trembling eagerness.

"As I believe God for Christ's sake has forgiven me," was the solemn answer. "I have long done so, but I could not bring myself to speak of it."

"Thank God!" she ejaculated, "thank God for that! Wherever he be—living—or—or

—whatever may further come upon us, thank God for that!"

Then she hung on his neck and I stole away unperceived. I was sorry I had unwittingly heard so much. Still I was thankful that whatever was wrong, my father had judged it, and mother's heart was satisfied. I had got a great light upon the past,—in the trouble which had hung as a cloud over her life he was in some strange way to blame. She had borne her burden without reproach; she was in some measure rewarded now.

The following morning after my father had sat for some time at the breakfast-table carefully perusing his letters, he handed one to mother saying,

"From Captain—now Major Murray."

She took it in silence and read it thoughtfully. "I like its tone," was all her comment.

"So do I; that man has in him the elements of good, but we could not trust him with our child."

"It would be a hazardous experiment," she replied, "we have seen it too often tried. A man weary of evil ways seeks repose and some return to the innocence of youth in the affection of a young wife. On it he can wholly depend; the outgoings of her pure mind stimulate him daily like fresh air from the hills; and he is too willing to be regarded by her as the hero he has ceased to be in his own eyes. I always felt it a terrible wrong to the girl."

"Major Murray would seek to retrieve any ill-doing no doubt, deploring it, as he says," returned my father gravely, "but he should try to live well for truth's sake only, and commence the work of reformation aright with 'the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.' For my part, I would not have given him my maid-servant, still less, my daughter. God grant she may be given back to us."

It was evident that if Helen was restored to health, Major Murray could not be allowed

to help her on, or make her path smooth through life. I did not know whether he wished to do so, but the conversation I have related left the impression on my mind that he would gladly try the experiment. Our beloved one, if she recovered, would be a very delicate flower indeed, requiring much care and tenderness, and could only be committed to judicious keeping. Again, I was not assured that Major Murray could help any one in the heavenward course, or even that he was firmly and consistently treading it himself. No, doubtless my father was right.

Still there was that terrible "if!" Helen's life hung in the balance, and we could not tell "what a day might bring forth." So I stole up to a little ante-room, from which I could hear an occasional moan of pain from the sickroom, and casting myself upon my knees prayed that, if it was God's will, those dark days of trial might pass away. Oh, how long it appeared since I had said I never knew trouble! Oh, how long since day had suc-

ceeded day in an unbroken calm in this our happy home! Would the "mist and the darkness" which first fell around us with the shadow of another's trouble, ever pass away?

CHAPTER XVII.

TO LIVE.

At last there came a change for the better, and Helen was restored.

A few spring flowers were pushing their tender shoots up through the hard earthy bed where their roots had lain unheeded through the long winter: type of a better resurrection. There had come a resurrection even here and then, for looking on my dear sister and back over the dark days from which we had emerged with her to life and liberty, my spirits rose to such gladness and freedom it seemed as if earth-stains were for ever past, and I never could know trouble more. Thus,

"Through struggle, toil and strife,
We prosper, then lose breath,
And sinking, truly rise
To live."

"I never can doubt God's love again, mamma," I said with joyful tears.

"Not till next time," answered my mother with a grave shake of the head. "Ah, Connie! I have thought this after fresh proofs of His goodness, but the very next trial found me weak and faithless as ever. We cannot lay in stores of grace to last us a lifetime, but need it every hour."

I gathered a bunch of violets white and blue, and placed them in my sister's room, where their sweet odour might welcome her back to earth. Doctor Hobart had given me a lovely *gloire de Dijon* rose from his uncle's greenhouse. I did not know how carefully he had nursed it for its destined place, but thought how like my sister it was as I left it on her table. She arose that day, feeble and faint, limping as she took a few steps to the couch prepared for her, and almost carried by our father's arm, yet most lovely—most precious to us of all created beings. Yes, I never thought her so lovely in spite of her pale, thin

face, and the seam which crossed one temple; I suppose because I never loved her half so well. Not even when I thought we had looked our last upon her living form did I feel towards her as now when she was received as from the dead. Ah, what can equal the joy of re-union?

Like her Divine Master in sending His first resurrection message to Peter, Helen's inquiries, when permitted thus to leave her bed, were for Hope. Our cousin who had not been allowed to converse with the invalid since the accident, was tutored for this interview. She obeyed every injunction and carefully controlled all emotion, yet though not a sob, or disturbing word escaped, hers was evidently not the calm of indifference, or want of feeling. A wistful affection shone in her dark eyes which Helen answered.

"Hope, dear, it is for the best."

"Yes," our cousin replied, a tear starting in spite of her efforts to be calm, "I know it is."

"And I have been told the very best news I could hear about you," Helen said. "I think it helped to make me well."

Hope could not trust herself to speak, but she smiled into the clear, truthful eyes which sought hers, and pressed the hand she held. Then we seated ourselves on low stools beside the couch, not talking but quietly enjoying.

"How lovely these flowers are; how fragrant! Connie, though I did not see you doing so, I know who placed them here. Every time I look at them they will remind me of my little sister, though I do not need to be so reminded," she added fondly.

"Ah, they should remind you of some one else far better than I," I said. "Where did I get the rose, Helen?"

"From Williams," she suggested.

"Guess again, my dear."

Helen did not guess, but she turned her face a little aside from the firelight which glowed too strongly. I raised a screen for her

protection, but by her desire her couch was moved somewhat nearer to the window.

We looked out over the sloping lawn bordered at the side by its row of tall trees. The branches were leafless still, but the day was fair and calm, and through them the sunlight glinted in bright patches across the freshly-springing grass. Our lawn was ever well cared for, and the grass there ever green. A robin perched outside and sang his sweet song to welcome her back to earth. I took a few crumbs of biscuit and placing them on the sill he remained there happy in his feast, looking in at us ever and anon with his bright, inquiring eyes. All nature seemed to rejoice in the return of spring. And to us, most of all, had come a springtime of hope.

Yet childhood seemed to be past with me; indeed it appeared years since I had tasted its simple pleasures and sorrows. The events which had arisen afterwards were like mighty barriers shutting out and hiding all but the memory of that early, happy past. Again I

saw the cattle pass the gate (they were turned in early for hand-feeding at this season); and felt strangely borne back in thought to that eventful morning when the claims of my mother's cousin and her desolate child were first acknowledged by us. Yet looking back and reviewing what had happened I would not have had it otherwise. Through it all God had wrought out His own purposes of good. I remembered the blessing which had come to Hope in the knowledge of a Saviour's love. I remembered how the pride and hardness of my own rebellious heart had been broken down. I remembered too, the humble confession I had heard in the dining-room. No; I would not have had it otherwise.

A good man has said, "He could have done without his joys, but he never could have done without his sorrows." Still, looking back, I solemnly record this day, that I could have missed one of my early pleasures and my life not have been the poorer, but through the greatest trouble and anxiety I have ever yet

known my happiness has been increased and my life enriched.

Well, we were a happy party. A fire burned cheerfully in the grate, beside which my father sat in his arm-chair and slippers. It was most unusual for him to be in the house at this hour, but this was an unusual occasion. My mother's chair was beside my sister's couch; her arm beneath our darling's head.

"John," she said, "on this happy occasion, and in acknowledgment of the great mercies we have received, I think we ought unitedly to thank God."

All knelt but Helen, and our father in simple words rendered praise to God for the rich and unmerited blessings bestowed upon us. He prayed, also, that we might show our sense of them in lives more than ever devoted to His service, in minds subject to His will, and never forget the lessons He intended us to learn in the dark days of trial. There was no undue excitement. His prayer was calm

and solemn, and the answer came in renewed peace and strength.

It was some time after this that Helen, who had lain very still, said,

"There is one question I have long wished to ask, but feared you would think it ought not to trouble me, and perhaps would not have answered. May I ask it now?"

"If it troubles you, my child, you had better try and get rid of it," our father replied with a smile. "It is well it should find expression."

"Well, then, I want very much to know what happened to the bay mare."

"She is dead," my father said in a perfectly quiet but cheerful tone, "and it did not trouble us."

Helen felt it should not trouble her either, though we all knew she was very fond of the poor animal. We were silent as we thought of what a loss we *might* have had, and she thanked God and smiled in the joy of our re-union.

"And Lassie?" she questioned again.

"Lassie, when she found herself uncared-for, made her way home," returned my father. "We passed her on the road."

"I never saw her," I exclaimed.

"No, because your mind was too highly wrought, your thoughts far away, and you did not notice surrounding objects."

"Indeed I did, papa: I noticed you and Doctor Hobart very well. I had thought him a very quiet man before."

"And what did you think him then?"

"A desperate one."

There was a little laugh at this as the only comment, but when Doctor Hobart paid his accustomed visit that day Helen simply said as she gave him her hand,

"I cannot thank you."

"I hope not," he rejoined with a smile.

This seemed a very puzzling reply and of doubtful meaning to me, but his next remark was even more so.

"I can never forget what I owe to your care," Helen continued.

"I hope not."

As children say when they are tired of guessing, "I gave it up." I knew Doctor Hobart would not wish to remind people of their obligations to him, or take advantage of mere gratitude, but afterwards found he was quite willing to be repaid in other fashion in this case, and did not contemplate his care of my sister ceasing with the illness.

"He is a strange fellow," my father exclaimed a few days later, "after all this long attendance, his professional skill, and the demands of his time night and day, he positively refuses a fee."

"Do not be too sure of that," laughed Dr. Hobart, who had entered unperceived.

"I *am* sure of it, however."

"Then you are mistaken."

My father looked surprised. "Could I have misunderstood?" he asked.

"You did not make the fee tempting enough," the young man said.

"Then name it in sincerity and it is yours," was the eager reply.

"Not so fast," returned Doctor Hobart, "I must first satisfy myself that it is in your power to give before I urge my claim. What tempted the youth in Schiller's 'Diver?' It was not gold."

My father looked steadily at his companion: I think the two men understood one another then. After this I was told to run away, and they were left alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RETURN.

HAVE you ever noticed, my reader, how great events seem to tread one upon another after a long season of monotonous calm? They stand out in our lives like a huge mountain range in the material world, overshadowing and shutting in from the gaze the valleys between. The mental vision is arrested by them as the mind travels back, while at the time of occurrence we almost gasped, "What next? What can exceed?" Even so came events of overpowering importance to us at that time.

It was the very day after the scene I have just narrated, the very day after Helen's acknowledged restoration,

> "It was the evening that ended May,
> And the sky was a glory of tenderness."

I had watched with Hope the sun set in rich splendour: then one by one his bright rays melted away from flame to rose, from rose to amber, from amber to grey, and dulness and quiet reigned over all. We had taken a turn or two on the broad avenue and over the dewy lawn, then Hope shivered and ran back to the house for a shawl, while I was left to meditate alone.

"I stood in the gathering twilight,
In a gently blowing wind;
And the house looked half uneasy,
Like one that was left behind.

Browned and brooded the twilight,
And sank down through the calm,
Till it seemed for some human sorrows
There could not be any balm."

Ah, there was a balm for mine, and now the trouble was overpast, my heart swelled with deep gratitude and a sense of its own joy. Suddenly, without any train of thought to account for it, there came back to memory the gipsy's warning, and from that my mind naturally reverted to her prophecy. I thought

of her assertion that my brother was living, and a great longing to see that absent brother, to witness his restoration, to know he was one with us in heart and soul, came upon me, and through the wide universe my spirit sought his. Was my soul's yearning prophetic? or my prayer in vain?

All the next day such thoughts possessed me, until late in the afternoon I took a book to divert my fancy and seated myself in the dining-room window. It was *The Chronicles of the Schonberg-Cotta Family.* The shades of day's decline began to fall across the page, but I had become intensely interested and read on. Raising my head at last, as I was gazing straight before me out of the side window in a mental effort to picture Luther to my satisfaction, I became aware of a pair of eyes intently watching me from without.

At that side of the house (not the one in which my bedroom was, and where the avenue branched off as I have said), was a

sort of shrubbery with ornamental planting, and rockeries in which I specially delighted. I often stole out there to see the gleam of the white stones amidst the dark plants,—the effects of light and shade,—by moonlight. "Sheeted ghosts," I used to call them; though certainly their height was not appalling. It was from amongst these the eyes now looked out upon me.

I am not, as I said, naturally nervous, but the look in those eyes held me spell-bound. I had no power to move or speak, and hardly breathed. I could only partly see a man's figure as it was half hidden behind a column over which strange plants drooped so gracefully, and lovely parasites clung and twined in rich confusion. The face was in clear light but I did not recognise it, though at the same time it seemed in some way strangely familiar. I might have seen it in a dream. How long we gazed upon each other I cannot tell. The shades began to fall, the daylight faded more and more, and without my per-

ceiving where or how he went, the intruder was gone.

I gave a great sigh of relief, for the circumstance made a strong impression upon me. I knew all the men employed upon the farm; I knew the tenants near: it was not one of them. It must have been some one who had lately come to the neighbourhood and had taken what is called "a short cut," through the grounds, missing his way. There was no cause for alarm, I said to myself; nevertheless, I was alarmed. I resolved to acquaint my father.

He was the only one I told, I cannot say why, unless that mother, being a good deal out of bed at night, I did not wish needlessly to alarm her. My father made no comment upon my intelligence. He neither made light of it nor exaggerated my fears. Only I watched him presently walk quietly round the house, and he saw to the fastening of shutter and bolt himself that night.

With the morning's light the impression

this little occurrence made upon me entirely faded, and I was ready to laugh at my silly fears. My father, however, did not laugh at them. He seized an opportunity, when we found ourselves for a few moments alone, to say hurriedly,

"Connie, I would satisfy myself that the person you saw last night had no evil intent. I want you to sit in the dining-room window this evening exactly as you did before, about the same hour. I will be in the library close to you. If you see the man again do not stir, but call softly to me. A whisper will do. I know you are not easily frightened and will help me in this matter."

I knew my father intended this, for commendation and compliments from him were rare. I resolved to deserve his good opinion. His attaching so much importance to an event I was willing to pass over and wholly forget, made me attach importance to it too, and it was with a beating heart I took the appointed seat at the appointed time.

My eyes were upon the book, but I could not read one word of it: at least, if I did, my mind failed to receive its meaning. Neither the undaunted Luther, nor the gentle character of Eva, which always reminded me of Helen's, could attract, far less rivet my attention. Still I think I acted my part well, for I tried to avoid all appearance of watchfulness. I only raised my head twice in a sort of furtive observation, and the second time I did so felt the fascination of the strange gaze was upon me.

The library was next the dining-room, and it opened with two doors,—one from the passage without, one into the dining-room close to where I sat. It encouraged me not a little to feel my father was near: without moving from my position or evincing any token of disturbance I now softly called to him. He heard me at once; his figure crossed the room in the dim light behind me. I felt it without turning my head: indeed I was so spell-bound I could not avert my gaze from the answering

gaze without. It crossed the room to the door and was gone.

I began to feel frightened, yet dared not stir. The gloom was deepening round me, and I was alone. I was in such a state of nervous excitement I could have screamed at a shadow, yet felt the oppressive lethargy of a dream. Still my scrutiny never failed.

All at once I saw a dark figure, erect yet active, appear on the gravelled path and advance quickly towards the shrubbery. My father had gone out by a side door and could thus approach unperceived by the intruder. I checked the cry that rose to my lips; the moment for action and release was come, and with the sense of danger I was free. I sprang to the door and with light steps rushed out: whatever was impending I would share.

The hall-door was quickly unfastened: I left it open and passed on. Turning a corner of the gravelled path in the dim, uncertain light, there fled before me an active figure,

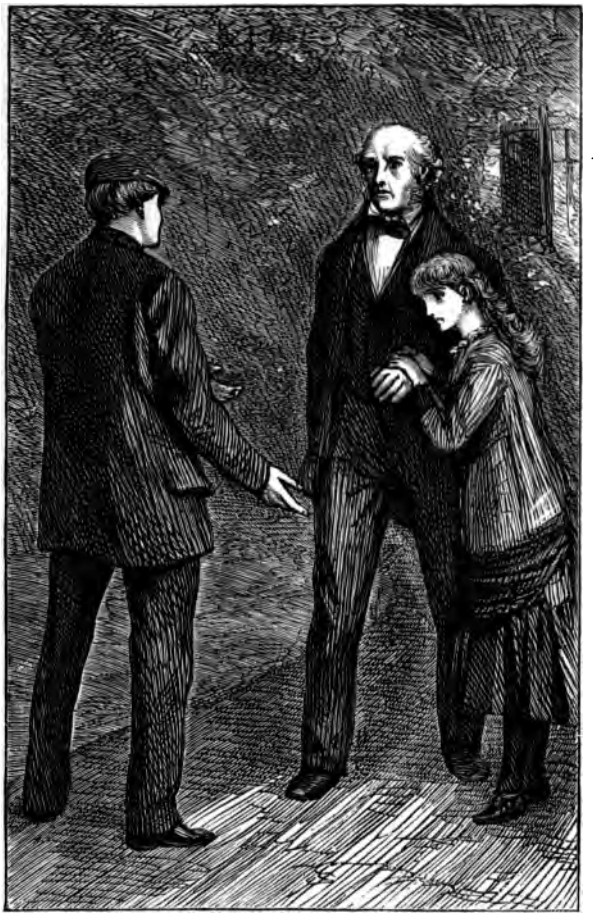
while one scarcely less active was close behind it. To reach the latter I strove. I did not think I would prove a sorry defender; I did not think my presence might embarrass: still less, did I apprehend danger to myself. I would only stand beside my father in that to which I had brought him.

Just then when closest pressed I saw the foremost figure turn fully round and stand still. I saw my father reel and stagger back as if he had received a blow. My weak little arms were around him in an instant, but he seemed to have grown suddenly weak too, for he only pushed me feebly aside as if he did not well know what he was doing. I heard him utter the name of God,—not profanely,—oh no! not idly, but as one in sore need might invoke aid.

"Harry!" he gasped. "Harry, have you come back from the dead to accuse me?"

The stranger paused as if to gain strength, then in a voice husky with emotion, said,

"So you persuaded yourself I was clean



"You can ask me that," replied the young man almost fiercely.—*Page 215.*

gone and could trouble you no more. Doubtless you wished me dead."

There was no reply to this, only a second gasping inquiry,

"Why are you here?"

"And you can ask me that, and my sister lies sick, perhaps dying, in that house!" replied the young man almost fiercely, pointing to the upper windows which were visible, and from which a light now streamed. "You did your best, but could not destroy all nature in me, and turn my heart to stone by your dead, hard, lifeless piety. Righteous you said you were, but God is righteous, and they say He too is love. You could not, at least, prevent my watching here night after night as I have done: unless indeed you have me hunted off your grounds as unworthy to tread the same spot of earth with you. To this no doubt your want of charity would bring you."

My father evidently was perplexed, nay more, he was broken down by this long tirade.

Still the pride which had sustained him so long could not all at once give way ; and there was something of concentrated passion in the stern question,

"Have you come to disgrace us?"

"Disgrace!" returned the young man, almost hissing out each word with terrible distinctness, "I don't know what you call disgrace. If to work hard night and day for an honest living is disgrace, then it has come upon me, and upon you through me. See these hands," and he stretched them out and turning up both palms laid them level before us in the still air, "they are not the hands of a gentleman : they are horny with toil. They have held by slippery ropes in the wild, howling storm, when one had to cling for dear life and to loose one's hold was to perish, but they have never taken what was not honestly their own."

"If this is true all else may be forgiven," said my father solemnly.

"I swear it by all that is holy."

"Swear not at all, sir," was the stern reprimand, "or I shall speak with you no more."

Even in the growing darkness I could see a bitter smile pass over my brother's face. For he was my brother, of that I had now no doubt; and oh, my heart's tenderest affection went out to him with a strong and yearning pity.

"How did you come here?" our father questioned again.

"Our ship put into Liverpool and we were paid off. There I chanced to see a scrap of an old newspaper with an account of my sister's accident. It was long past, but I came off here at once and have since lodged near. I leave to-morrow."

"Not so," replied my father with a great burst of tenderness, putting out both his hands, "Harry, my son,—my injured boy, come home!"

I sprang to the wanderer's side and gave one shy, frightened look into his face; then

my arms were put up to his neck while he clasped his round me, and I sobbed out upon his breast,

"Harry, my dear, dear brother, come home, —come home!"

CHAPTER XIX.

AT LAST.

My brother! I said it many times to myself in the few minutes which ensued. It was so hard to believe, to realise that I was actually standing there in the embrace of the one for whose coming I had longed and prayed: with him whose absence had shaded my mother's life. Oh! what a joy was even now to come to her, when at last the mists should roll away, and blissful certainty take the place of a life-long suspense.

I drew myself back to take a general survey of my brother. I could not see him as clearly as I wished in the uncertain light, but saw he was young and strong, a man with stalwart frame, bronzed face, and eyes whose wistful gaze I knew full well. His was not a hard

face: I admired and loved it already. He was an honest man, and I was proud of him.

"And you are really my brother?" I said.

"And you are really my little sister?" he returned. "I could scarcely believe it as I watched you last night. 'Baby Connie' I used to call you when I went away."

"I am Connie still."

"All right, dear," he rejoined, kissing me.

Then we spoke of other things and learnt something of his history in the long years of absence. In brief, pointed sentences he told us his story.

"When you refused to receive me back," he said, addressing my father, "I should have perished but for the kindness of a good man. He found me penniless, and induced me to enter a Home where were other lads younger and older, some better, some worse than I. From that shelter I was put on board a training-ship and have served in the merchant

service for well-nigh seven years. I received proofs of good conduct from the skippers under whom I sailed."

"You are not bound to any of them to return to-morrow?" put in my father anxiously.

"No, I was going to look for a ship."

Dear father appeared relieved; then he remained lost in thought for some minutes ere he said,

"It will not do for you to come home so late to-night: your mother must be prepared for this. Connie, run back to the house, I will stand at the corner until I see you safely in; then I must walk with your brother to arrange for the morrow."

I did as I was desired, trembling with happiness, and entered by the side-entrance, having found the hall-door shut. No one had noticed my absence but Hope, my mother being engaged in Helen's room. To my cousin I told what had happened, as I felt at liberty to do, so knowing it could not be kept a secret much longer. I think I should have

told it to some one or I would have lost the little reason I retained. Relating it enabled me to realise it better.

We rejoiced together as we had wept together. She entered into my hopes, and her dark eyes grew lustrous with delight, so that I was conscious of a sudden sensation of wonder at my having ever thought her plain or uninteresting. But everything was specially beautiful to me that night, and my own happy emotions cast a brightness on all around. Never had I so gloried in my home as when I thought all its comfort and elegance was to be opened up and lavished upon him who should come as its young master,—my long-lost brother. It was well that my mother did not leave the invalid's room that night, or she might have seen at a glance something unusual had happened, and my suppressed excitement might have led to a premature disclosure.

The next morning I was calmer, and prepared again to play an important part at this

most remarkable stage in our history. A glance of happy intelligence passed from my father to me as we took our seats at the breakfast-table. I thought he might have told my mother ere we met, but found he had not. I suppose he had judged it better to let her have an undisturbed night's repose, she had lost so much rest of late. Perhaps for Helen's sake he would not have her earnest attention called off at this critical season.

I met him as I was crossing the hall after breakfast and he detained me for a few moments.

"I do not know how to tell her, Connie," he said. "It should not be abruptly done, yet from me in any way I can think of, it must be so. She has suffered so much of late. My child, could you lead to it in any way? You have been a regular heroine of late. Ask your mother about the past: she will only think it a child's curiosity."

With serious misgivings I promised to

attempt this, but felt very much as if ordered to walk up to a cannon's mouth. If I failed I was to seek my father and let him, at least, know the result of my mission. When the first sense of responsibility was over I felt a sort of pride in acting in conjunction with my wise father, and a perfect fever of delight at contemplating the happy conclusion which by some means or other must be brought about.

I went back to the breakfast-room where my mother was alone and busy about some preparation. I sat quietly down beside her.

"Mamma," I began, "do you remember the strange dream I had before Helen's accident, and what you afterwards promised to tell me?"

She looked up with a start.

"I don't think we should recur to it now, Connie. We have both suffered much in other ways since then."

"Does the trouble you knew then press

heavily now, mamma? Does it ever seem light?"

"No," she said, "it never can seem that, but God has taught me how to bear it better."

Poor mother! I did not think she could have borne it better than she had done all through my early days.

"Tell me something of it now; do, mamma, please," I pleaded, a natural curiosity blending with my desire to communicate the joyful intelligence with which I was charged.

"Well then, as I have promised," she replied, trying to speak steadily, at the same time ceasing her occupation and gazing dreamily into the fire as if she sought to recall some absent image, "you were still a mere baby when your brother Harry ran away."

"Ran away!" I echoed. "Ran away from home—from this place!"

"Yes; he fancied he was hardly dealt with in something at first of slight importance,—

some trivial offence, and so he ran away. He would afterwards have returned when we discovered where he was, but this was not allowed."

She did not explain further. She would not attach blame to my father: I could not have heard him blamed.

"Did you never hear since then from my brother?" I asked.

"But once," was the sad reply, "that letter was unanswered."

"Poor brother!" I sighed.

"Dear boy!" echoed my mother fondly.

"And if ever you should hear from him again would his letter be treated as the last was?" I ventured to inquire.

"We shall never hear again," she said with a burst of uncontrollable grief, "never hear again. Ten long years have passed since that letter; ten long years of cruel silence. I often think when I reach the better land my God will let me know all about him, and I shall find my prayers and tears were not in vain.

It is my comfort, however, now to feel that his father's heart is tender towards his absent son, and I believe he is forgiven and would be welcomed now."

"He is!" I burst forth, unable longer to control my feelings and keep up a pretence of sympathy with sorrow, "he is!"

My mother looked at me with intense surprise, which deepened, as she gazed, into wild alarm and dread, then in turn changed to nervous expectation. At last my eager look, my changing colour, my raining tears told her all the story.

"Child," she exclaimed, in her excitement clutching my shoulders and shaking me as she might have done a reed, "child, what does this mean? Tell me—tell me *at once*, do you know——have you heard anything of your brother?"

"I have," I replied, "mamma, dear mamma, be quiet and I will tell you all."

She clasped her hands tightly together over her heart. She stood still as a stone.

"He lives—he is well—he is here!" I sobbed.

Two words only broke from her quivering lips: two words which told of a life-long sorrow, of many prayers, of patient waiting, of glad thanksgiving,—"At last!"

I heard a step in the passage without; I opened the door and beckoned to my father who was watching there. He understood the signal, in another minute had withdrawn, and dear mother was in her son's arms. Not the boy who had gone forth, but a bronzed and bearded man, yet not less her son.

At last prayer was answered, at last hope was crowned, at last the weary night-watch over, at last "clear shining after rain."

CHAPTER XX.

OUT OF THE FLOOD.

"MOTHER, whose is the strange step that pauses at my door and then passes on?" Helen asked.

She was getting quite strong now: in a day or two more we expected to have her downstairs and even out a little in the clear sunshine.

"A strange step, dear," mother rejoined, evidently taken aback and at a loss how to answer, "do you know all our footsteps?"

"I do well," she replied, "and this is not father's, or——Doctor Hobart's."

(I had occasion ere this to observe she knew Doctor Hobart's as well as any.)

"Suppose we call your father, as he is

downstairs, and ask him," was our mother's suggestion.

I knew her object in leaving the room was to consult him as to the course she should pursue. His decision might be gathered from his first words as he entered with her.

"I don't believe joy kills anybody; instead of that, as I am assured, it is a restorer, Helen, your mother may tell you whose was the strange step you heard crossing the corridor."

Helen's colour came and went after the old fashion. If to be told at all, she must be told immediately.

"Think of some one you would wish to see, whose step would be as music to us all," he added.

"It cannot be"—— The words died upon the poor girl's lips.

"It is!" exclaimed my mother joyfully. "My darling, the wanderer for whom you have prayed with me has come back."

"Oh, thank God!" Helen murmured, clasp-

ing her thin little hands together. "God has been very good to us. Truly, 'our cup runneth over.'"

Then we were all re-united, and the voice of thanksgiving and song of praise were in the house where lately grief had been.

Perhaps we were not fitting recipients for God's bounty before; we dwelt at ease, and I, at least, had known no trouble. Now we had all been trained in one school,—the school of sorrow. I had taken my seat beside my cousin there, and with humbled, ay, broken hearts, had been put into a position of blessing. I had arisen each morning, went forth each day, and lay down at night, like "the bees giddy with clover," gathering up the honey and feeling life was deliciously sweet, but never thanking God that it was undimmed by care. I could give nothing but bitterness in return for a bitterness engendered by "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." Oh, ever since I have known sorrow I have wondered how a stranger to the love of Jesus

can bear its terrible visitation and live. For the world is full of trouble, and its 'bright spots are outnumbered by the dreary," and not the youngest and happiest among us can say, "It will not come to me!" What should I have done on that dreary night when I thought my sister lay dying, and in the trying days that succeeded if I could not take refuge in prayer, and in the belief that a loving Father was ruling over all. In truth, those only are prepared to receive joy aright, and can be trusted with happiness, who have been trained in God's school.

Helen lived and loved. I don't think I was one whit better than I used to be in the former foolish days, but at least, I was not a bit jealous. There were two reasons for this, one was, that I had a sincere admiration and deep affection for Doctor Hobart, and from what I have said of my sister one may divine I had a high opinion of her. My father had once called me a heroine, and I am afraid I shall feel naughtily proud of it to the end of

my days; but certainly Helen was more than any mere strong-minded heroine to me, even the purest type of womanhood.

Another reason why the famous green-eyed monster did not possess me and hold me captive in its vile chains was, that I had a fresh object of interest and affection with whom to divide my attention in my newly-recovered brother. I never grew weary of listening to his wonderful tales of other lands and seas, his "hair-breadth 'scapes" and wild exploits. He was such a grand, big fellow, that I should not have feared a whole encampment of gipsies with him at my side; and he seemed to be able to climb anywhere, "hanging on by his eyelids," as he said. He not only found an eager listener in me, but Hope (perhaps from the fact of her being a sailor's daughter), was more interested in his recitals than I had ever seen her in any earthly information. It was no marvel, poor girl, for I have since found how every one connected with the sea, despite its terrible storms and

consequent trials, gets to love its wild free profession, even as Madge, the beautiful gipsy, loved the fresh life in the greenwood.

Of her we heard yet once again. During a brief absence from the neighbourhood Doctor Hobart had occasion to visit Earlswood, and there, at some gospel services held on the common near Red Hill, he encountered the beautiful gipsy. She was now an eager listener for herself to the truths of salvation, and evinced every evidence of sincere reception. She could not be induced to abandon her wandering life, however, but doubtless went back to her own people to "tell what great things the Lord had done" for her, and further other efforts for their good.

Of Major Murray we also heard. He married a city heiress, sold his commission, and bought a small property where he established a sort of model farm. My father always said the only thing the ex-officer understood about the management of the latter was from hints he had given. At all

events, to my father, at least, was owing the taste for agricultural pursuits.

And so the bright days came, and in our hearts there was summer. My father and mother would not permit Helen to leave home until her health was fully restored, but Doctor Hobart was very forbearing and patient. I was very often with them, and am bound to confess my presence proved no restraint.

Helen never ventured on horseback again: a natural nervous dread had taken the part of her former careless courage. I was not left without a companion, however, in my favourite exercise, for Hope conquered her objection to becoming an equestrian, and on a pretty, docile little animal my father had purchased for her, together we scoured the country with my brother. Hope had lost all her sickly appearance and was growing not only into healthy womanhood, but becoming really handsome in face and with a tall, stately figure. I felt a very pigmy beside her, and yet—and yet,—but this is not my own life-

story, only some early sketches to illustrate a truth.

Helen's words,—"God has been very good to us,"—have echoed through my mind many times in the years that succeeded. I saw our beloved sister go forth from our home a bride, glad and fair, and if a little frail, she had a strong arm to lean upon, a tender spirit in happy harmony with her own to cheer her through life. She is now the wife of a very busy man, and it is said, does nearly as much good amongst her husband's patients by her grace and tenderness as he does by his skill. I am afraid this is partial indeed, and rather a libel upon my dear brother Doctor Hobart. She now brings two lovely boys to chase each other in and out of the old rooms which echo with their mirth. They are called after my father and old Doctor Barton.

Our father settled one of the out-farms on Harry, but he continued to live with us, as dear mother could scarcely bear him out of her sight. It was beautiful to witness his

devotion to her, and when some years later he thought of taking unto himself his cousin to wife, she was prepared to welcome his choice, and simply said, "A good son must make a good husband!" I suppose Hope thought so too; at all events, she declared to me in confidence (which so late in life, I may betray), that the only dream of her youth was about to be realised, even that she might marry a sailor! A Christian poet has said,

> "Not even the tenderest heart and next our own,
> Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh."

Certainly I had not read my cousin aright, for I never suspected this underlying vein of romance.

Hope did not leave us either; my father said "the house was big enough for all," and I added, "beautiful enough for all," which the bride-elect fully endorsed. I am thankful to say my brother had received good impressions in the Home which sheltered him when the doors of his own were closed against him, and these were deepened until they effected a last-

ing change of mind (which indeed is true repentance), and bore rich fruit in a life of rectitude and desire for others good. His purse as well as father's, and Hope's ready ingenuity, were often at the command of Helen and Hobart in their efforts to alleviate the sufferings to which mankind is heir.

It always does me good to look at my mother as she leans upon father's arm, just as if he was a young man and her hair brown instead of grey. More than once she has said to me,

"Connie, truly you were God's messenger to me in the time of trial: my comforter in the mist, and hour of darkness."

And with grateful tears I have rejoined,

"Not till God placed me on a low seat in His school."

THE END.

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